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THE GREATER MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

THE GREATER MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

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EDITOR OF "THE EXPOSITORY TIMES" "THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE" "THE DICTIONARY OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPELS" AND "THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS"

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PREFACE.

THE desire of the Editor of *The Greater Men and Women of the Bible* is to make the preaching of the present day accurate and attractive. It must attract the attention and win the heart of hearers, otherwise it makes little or no impression. One of the surest ways of securing attractiveness is a restrained use of illustrations. Touch the imagination and the heart is almost won. The illustrations in this series of books are fresh, being for the most part taken from books that have been published quite recently. And they are carefully chosen so as to make the point clear and telling.

But present-day preaching must also be accurate. The Men and Women of the Bible are often chosen as subjects for popular lectures, and sometimes little attention is paid to the truth of the lecture if only it is popular. In these volumes the most authoritative books have been consulted and used, so that the statements contained in them may be relied upon with confidence. Criticism is kept subordinate to construction, as it should always be in the pulpit, but the work of the critic is not forgotten any more than that of the discoverer.

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ADAM.

And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.—Gen. i. 27.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.—Gen. ii. 7.

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it.—Gen. ii. 15.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.—1 Cor. xv. 22.

1. To the modern reader of the Bible the interest of Adam is threefold. He is the race, the representative of the race, or an individual with unique experiences. It may not be possible to separate Adam as man, or as the representative of men, from Adam as an individual; there is no clear distinction in the Scriptures, and we may find it impossible to maintain the distinction consistently in our own minds. But we do undoubtedly think of Adam as an individual, with a wife called Eve and with sons called Cain, Abel, and Seth, and there is some advantage as well as interest in preserving his individuality. On the other hand, it is undeniable that, in the Old Testament as in the New, Adam is chiefly regarded either as simply the race "man," or as the first and representative of the race, "the man." If we consider separately, first Adam as man, next Adam as "the man," and then Adam as "a man," it will not be expected that the one conception will be kept wholly apart from the other; but it will be seen that the first is chiefly religious, the second chiefly theological in its interest, and the third chiefly ethical. The threefold distinction is suggested by the early narratives in Genesis. In Gen i. 26–28, the Hebrew *adham*, "man," is mankind; in ii. 4–iv. 26, we have *ha-adham*, "the man"; and in v. 1–5, Adam is a proper name.

¶ Gen. i. 26–28 is part of the "Priestly" narrative. In the Priestly narrative (P) of Creation (Gen. i. 1–ii. 4[a]) Elohim creates "mankind" (*adham*) in His own image, in two sexes, makes man supreme over all living creatures, bids him multiply, and gives him the fruits and grains for food. He blesses man. But whereas it is said separately of each of the other groups of creatures, "God saw that it was good," there is no such separate utterance concerning man; he is simply included in the general statement, "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

Gen. ii. 4–iv. 26 belongs to the "Prophetic" narrative. In the Prophetic (J) narrative (Gen. ii. 4[b]–iv. 26) Jahweh Elohim moulds "the man" out of dust, gives him life by breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, and places him in Eden to dress and keep it. Jahweh Elohim also makes the animals out of the soil (*'adhāmāh*) in order that "the man" may find a helpmeet; "the man" names them but finds no suitable helpmeet, and at last Jahweh Elohim builds up a woman out of a rib taken from "the man" while he slept: the woman proves a suitable helpmeet. Jahweh Elohim had forbidden "the man" to eat of the fruit of a certain "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" planted in the midst of Eden; but, tempted by the serpent, the woman ate of the forbidden fruit, and also persuaded the man to eat. Thereupon Jahweh Elohim drove them out of Eden, and man became subject to death.

Gen. v. 1–5 belongs again to the Priestly narrative. Adam is the ancestor of the human race; when he is 130 years old he begets Seth "in his own likeness, after his image." Afterwards Adam begat other children, and died at the age of 930.[1]

¶ After the first six chapters of Genesis, "adam" (as compared with other Hebrew words for "man") is very seldom used except in phrases denoting the class, men (also "every man," "not [any] man," "man and beast," etc.), and especially man in relation to God.

The patriarchal name "Adam" is very rare after Genesis, at least in our English Bibles. Job says "I covered my transgressions like Adam" (Targ. also "like Adam"); Hosea, "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." In both these cases the margin of R.V. has "men." Deuteronomy (A.V.) has "when he separated the sons of Adam," but R.V. has "the children of men." The LXX has "Adam" in none but the last of these three instances, where the translators perhaps thought that "the sons of Israel"—mentioned in the same sentence—are contrasted with

[1] W. H. Bennett, in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, i. 84.

"the sons of [sinful] Adam." According to the text of R.V., Job and Hosea represent Adam as the type of sinful man.[1]

2. The derivation of the name Adam is doubtful. The most plausible is that which connects it with the Assyr. *adāmu*, "make," "produce"; man is thus a "creature"—one made or produced. Some derive it from a root signifying "red" (cf. Edom, Gen. xxv. 30), men being of a ruddy colour in the district where the word originated. The Biblical writer (Gen. ii. 7) explains it, according to his frequent practice, by a play on the word *'adhāmāh*, "ground"; but that is itself derived from the same root "red."

3. One other preliminary point may be stated.

There is a theory that Golgotha received its name from the tradition that the skull of Adam was preserved there. The earliest known Greek writer to connect Adam with Golgotha is Origen (A.D. 185–253), who lived in Palestine for twenty years (A.D. 233–253), was a personal friend of the Bishop of Jerusalem, and a sound Hebrew scholar. Origen states (1) that there was a Hebrew tradition to the effect that Adam was buried at the Place of a Skull. Athanasius (296–373) says (2) that Christ did not suffer "in any other place, but in the Place of a Skull, which the Hebrew teachers declare was Adam's sepulchre." Epiphanius (312–403), who was of Hebrew origin, writes (3) that "Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified at Golgotha, in no other place than that in which Adam lay buried." Basil of Cæsarea (329–379), giving the Adam legend in a fuller form, states (4) that it was "a prevalent belief preserved in the Church by an unwritten tradition," that Adam was buried at the Place of a Skull, where Christ was crucified. Chrysostom (347–407) connects (5) Adam's death and burial with the Place of a Skull, and so do Nonnus Panopolitanus (6) (*circ.* 385–440), and Basil of Seleucia (7) (Bishop, 448), who calls it a tradition of the Jews. The tradition is not mentioned by Eusebius (260–339), by Cyril of Jerusalem (*circ.* 315–386), or by the historians of the fifth century—Theodoret, Sozomen, and Socrates.

The references to the Adam legend in Latin writers are few. It appears in some verses doubtfully ascribed to Tertullian (8) (155–230), and appended to his genuine works; and in a letter

[1] E. A. Abbott, *The Son of Man*, 25.

(9) from Cyprian (Bishop, 248) to Pope Cornelius, which is not accepted as genuine by Migne. Ambrose (*circ.* 340–397) writes (10): "There (at Golgotha) was the sepulchre of Adam," and ascribes (10*a*) a Hebrew origin to the tradition. Jerome (346–420) gives the legend without comment in the letter (11) of Paula and Eustochium to Marcella, but elsewhere he calls it (11*a*) a "stage miracle," and proposes (11*b*) a different explanation of the word Golgotha. There is a notice of it in the (spurious) sixth (12) sermon of Augustine (354–430), but none in the history of Rufinus (345–410). After the fifth century the Adam legend appears to have been greatly enlarged, if we may judge from the character it assumes in the writings of the Syrian Bishop, Moses Bar Cepha (13) (tenth century), and of the Patriarch of Alexandria, Saïd ibn Batrak, or Eutychius (14) (876–939). It appears in its most complete form in the Ethiopic *Book of Adam*, which bears evident traces of having reached Abyssinia *viâ* Egypt. This curious development is purely Oriental, and is found in the works of no Western writer.

An essential part of the legend appears to have been that the tomb of Adam was in the centre or navel of the earth; and this position is assigned to Golgotha by writers who do not connect that place with Adam. Thus Cyril of Jerusalem calls it "the very centre of the earth"; Didymus Alexandrinus (309–394), "the centre of the universe"; Victorinus of Poitiers, "the middle of the whole earth" (9*a*); Sophronius (*circ.* 564–637), "the navel of the earth"; and Andrea Cretensis (Archbishop of Crete, 675), "the middle of the earth."[1]

I.

Adam as Man.

The Religious Interest.

Of Adam as man, three things are recorded: (1) his Creation; (2) his Primitive Condition; and (3) his Fall.

1. The Creation of Man.

The creation of man is related twice, i. 26, 27 (P) and ii. 7 (J).

[1] Sir. C. W. Wilson, in *Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund*, Jan. 1902, p. 67.

The former passage is the result of philosophical and theological reflection of a late date, which had taught the writer that man is the climax of creation because his personality partakes of the Divine (and in v. 3 this prerogative is handed on to his offspring); but the latter is written from the naïve and primitive standpoint of legendary tradition, which dealt only with man's reception of physical life.

1. Two things are made emphatic regarding the creation of man. First, he was formed out of "dust." This is obviously a pictorial, or symbolical, expression of the fact that there is a material side to his nature, and that on this side of it he is connected with the earth. But by what process he was thus "formed"; through what intermediate forms, if any, the "dust" passed before it became man—these are questions which do not come within the range of the author's thought. It may be that, as science teaches, man, like many other species of living beings, arose by gradual differentiation and development, under varying conditions of environment, from a pre-existing form (or succession of forms) of life: but if, and in so far as, this theory is true, it simply implies an alteration in the manner in which God is conceived as having acted; what was supposed to have been accomplished by Him, as the result of a single act, some 6000 years ago, was really accomplished by Him as the result of a long process, extending through unnumbered years: the essential point, which the old Hebrew narrator has here seized, remains unaffected, that God (mediately, or immediately) "formed man of the dust of the ground." The second part of the same verse, "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," suggests that there is also another and a higher side to man's nature. And so the verse teaches by implication the truth of man's double nature. On the one hand, man has a material body, in virtue of which he is dependent for his support and welfare upon the material world, and has to accommodate himself to the material conditions under which he finds himself; on the other hand, his life is in some special sense a Divine gift; it brings with it intellectual and moral capacities, differing from those possessed by other animals, a sense of the reality and distinctive character of which is strongly impressed upon the narrative.

¶ Man is superior to the highest type of animals only by having the Divine spirit in him, the endowment of conscience. Conscience constitutes his dignity here, and will constitute his reward or punishment hereafter.[1]

2. The second emphatic thing is that man was made in the image of God. What, however, is meant by the "image of God," which man is thus said to bear? It is (1) something which evidently forms the ground and basis of his entire pre-eminence above animals; (2) it is something which is transmitted to his descendants (v. 1, 3, ix. 6), and belongs therefore to man in general, and not solely to man in a state of primitive innocence; (3) it relates, from the nature of the case, to man's immaterial nature. It can be nothing but the gift of self-conscious reason, which is possessed by man, but by no other animal. In all that is implied by this,—in the various intellectual faculties possessed by him; in his creative and originative power, enabling him to develop and make progress in arts, in sciences, and in civilization generally; in the power of rising superior to the impulses of sense, of subduing and transforming them, of mounting to the apprehension of general principles, and of conceiving intellectual and moral ideals; in the ability to pass beyond ourselves, and enter into relations of love and sympathy with our fellow-men; in the possession of a moral sense, or the faculty of distinguishing right and wrong; in the capacity for knowing God, and holding spiritual communion with Him,—man is distinguished fundamentally from other animals, and is allied to the Divine nature; so that, wide as is the interval separating him from the Creator, he may nevertheless, so far as his mental endowments are concerned, be said to be an "image" or adumbration of Him. From the same truth of human nature, there follows also the possibility of God being revealed in man (John i. 1–14).

¶ Man is an exception, whatever else he is. If he is not the image of God, then he is a disease of the dust. If it is not true that a Divine being fell, then we can only say that one of the animals went entirely off its head.[2]

2. Man's Primitive Condition.

The story of man's primitive condition is told in Gen. ii. 8–25

[1] George Frederick Watts, *Life and Writings*, iii. 324.
[2] G. K. Chesterton, *All Things Considered.*

(J). The narrative teaches: that man has work to do in life; that he needs a counterpart, a help who shall be "meet for him"; that man is supreme over the beasts in his intellectual ability, and therefore in the authority which he possesses to assign to them their several names; that man, in his primitive condition, was far from being morally or socially perfect; that he was from a moral standpoint innocent, because he had not yet learnt the meaning of right and wrong; and that this blissful ignorance is also portrayed by the pleasures of a luxuriant garden or park.

¶ As regards the condition of man before the Fall, there is a mistake not unfrequently made, which it is important to correct. It is sometimes supposed that the first man was a being of developed intellectual capacity, perfect in the entire range of his faculties, a being so gifted that the greatest and ablest of those who have lived subsequently have been described as the "rags" or "ruins" of Adam. This view of the high intellectual capacities of our first parents has been familiarized to many by the great poem of Milton, who represents Adam and Eve as holding discourse together in words of singular elevation, refinement, and grace. But there is nothing in the representation of Genesis to justify it; and it is opposed to everything that we know of the methods of God's providence. All that, as Christian theologians, we are called upon to believe is that a time arrived when man's faculties were sufficiently developed for him to become conscious of a moral law, and that, having become conscious of it, he broke it; he may have done this without possessing any of those intellectual perfections with which he has been credited, but the existence of which, at such a stage of history, would be contrary to the whole analogy of providence; progress, gradual advance from lower to higher, from the less perfect to the more perfect, is the law which is stamped upon the entire range of organic nature, as well as upon the history of the civilization and education of the human race. The fact that this law is the general rule is not affected by retrogression in civilization in particular cases. But it is sufficient for Christian theology, if we hold that, whatever the actual occasion may have been, and however immature, in intellect and culture, he may have been at the time, man failed in the trial to which he was exposed, that sin thus entered into the world, and that consequently the subsequent development of the race was not simply what God intended it to be; it has been attended through its whole course by an element of moral disorder, and thus in different ways it has been marred, perverted, impeded, or thrown back. And what has been said

remains true, even though it should be the case—though this is not the view which commends itself to modern anthropologists—that mankind are not all descended from a single human pair, but arose independently in different centres of the globe: the real unity of the human race consists not in unity of blood, but in identity of mental constitution, and of moral and spiritual capacities; in this case, therefore, as the facts are sufficient evidence of the presence of sin in all the races of mankind, the natural inference would be that each race independently passed through similar moral experiences, and each similarly underwent a "fall." The typical truth of the narrative of Gen. iii. would thus, if anything, be enhanced rather than diminished, if this supposition were true.[1]

1. Man's original state was, first of all, *one of high privilege and enjoyment.* His relative means and advantages corresponded to his elevated personal condition. The lordship of all was committed to him; and the region in which he was to have the seat of his dominion, the garden formed for his immediate occupation, was emphatically a region of life and blessing. Copious and refreshing streams watered it; herbs and trees of every kind, fitted to minister to his support and gratification, grew within its borders; and in the midst of all the tree of life, capable, whether by inherent virtue or by sacramental grace, to sustain life in undecaying freshness and vigour; so that provision was made, not only for the preservation of his being, but also for the dew of his youth ever abiding on him.

2. But, secondly, along with this, his position was *one of responsibility and action.* He was not to dwell in an idle and luxurious repose. The garden itself was to be kept and dressed, that it might yield to him of the abundance and variety which it was capable of affording; and from this, as a select and blessed centre, he was to operate by degrees upon the world around, and subdue it to himself—make it a sort of extended paradise. It is to be understood that the work thus devolved upon him, if the original constitution of things had stood, would have involved no toilsome or oppressive labour, but merely regular and active employment, such as is needful for the healthful condition of the human frame itself, and the happy play of all its faculties; and it implied, besides, the dignity and honour of being a fellow-worker

[1] S. R. Driver.

with God, in carrying the appointed theatre of man's existence to the degree of perfection which potentially indeed, but not yet actually, belonged to it.

¶ "To dress it and to keep it." That, then, was to be our work. Alas! what work have we set ourselves upon instead! How have we ravaged the garden instead of kept it—feeding our war-horses with its flowers, and splintering its trees into spear-shafts! "And at the east a flaming sword." Is its flame quenchless? and are those gates that keep the way indeed passable no more? or is it not rather that we no more desire to enter? For what can we conceive of that first Eden which we might not yet win back, if we chose? It was a place full of flowers, we say. Well: the flowers are always striving to grow wherever we suffer them; and the fairer, the closer. There may, indeed, have been a Fall of Flowers, as a Fall of Man; but assuredly creatures such as we are can now fancy nothing lovelier than roses and lilies, which would grow for us side by side, leaf overlapping leaf, till the earth was white and red with them, if we cared to have it so. And Paradise was full of pleasant shades and fruitful avenues. Well: what hinders us from covering as much of the world as we like with pleasant shade, and pure blossom, and goodly fruit? Who forbids its valleys to be covered over with corn till they laugh and sing? Who prevents its dark forests, ghostly and uninhabitable, from being changed into infinite orchards, wreathing the hills with frail-floreted snow, far away to the half-lighted horizon of April, and flushing the face of all the autumnal earth with glow of clustered food? But Paradise was a place of peace, we say, and all the animals were gentle servants to us. Well: the world would yet be a place of peace if we were all peacemakers, and gentle service should we have of its creatures if we gave them gentle mastery. But so long as we make sport of slaying bird and beast, so long as we choose to contend rather with our fellows than with our faults and make battlefield of our meadows instead of pasture—so long, truly, the Flaming Sword will still turn every way, and the gates of Eden remain barred close enough, till we have sheathed the sharper flame of our own passions, and broken down the closer gates of our own hearts.[1]

3. The Fall.

The Fall is recorded in Gen. ii. 16–iii. There came a point in human evolution when man became conscious of a command—the earliest germ of a recognition of an "ought"; and this at once caused a stress and strain between his lower animal nature,

[1] Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, pt. iv. ch. 1 (*Works*, vii. 13).

pictured as a serpent, and his higher aspirations after obedience;[1] by a deliberate following of the lower nature against which he had begun to strive, man first caused sin to exist; with the instant result of a feeling of shame, and the world-wide consequence of pain, trouble, and death and the cessation for ever of the former state of innocent ignorance and bliss.

¶ Whatever I find about Adam and Eve only articulates a truth in God. You test a thing by its illustrations. There appears to be a Fall because there was a transgression, but really it was the road to a blessed result; it was the way to a higher platform of consciousness. I think the Creation was God's sacrifice, and its purpose the full beatitude of creaturely life. You ask whether I do not "see the signs of a Fall everywhere, whether Creation does not look like a wreck." I see it as the wreck of a burst seed. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone"—that seems to me true of Creation; it brings forth numberless personalities as the result. I see no law of progress or education without that, for it seems impossible to have the fulness of light without tasting darkness. We *stand* in light by being well educated into it, a gleam of consciousness grows thus into fulness. Some antagonistic condition seems needed for development. Is not our revelation in the beginning of Genesis an expression of truth on this subject in such a form as we can understand? Adam, as an inexperienced babe, in the stage of innocence does not represent to me the Adam of manhood; he was naked, that is, imperfect. He has to die to innocence to attain his holiness, which is perfection; the second Adam is the Holy One. All that comes to pass is for the education of man out of innocence into the consciousness of holiness.[2]

II.

Adam as "the Man."

The Theological Interest.

In the theological interest of Adam we turn to St. Paul's doctrine of the First and the Second Adam.

1. "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." The thought which links together the two clauses of this

[1] The serpent is nowhere in the Old Testament identified with the devil; the idea is not found till Wis. ii. 23.

[2] R. W. Corbet, *Letters from a Mystic of the Present Day*, 34.

sentence is that of the unity of the race and the consequent possibility of the effect upon the whole of the acts of individual members. St. Paul teaches that the whole mass of humanity was affected by "one man's disobedience," that in consequence of a shock at the very beginning the whole mechanism of human nature was put out of gear. And as a matter of fact this jarring and discord of human nature is what we see all through human history; and it is universal. We see it not less in the lives of the saints—in the impatience of Moses, in the passion of David, in the pride of Hezekiah—than in the awful and unmitigated degradation of the world before the Flood, and of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the wickedness of those whom the Lord drove out of Canaan from before the face of His own people. And this universal taint and corruption is not only a fact established by history, it is acknowledged and confessed by all who have allowed themselves to consider it. David confesses it of himself: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Jeremiah cries out, as he contemplates the sin of his fellow-countrymen: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." And the confession of the heathen poet is hardly less emphatic: "I see and I appreciate what is better, yet I follow what is worse."

And this universal reign of sin was accompanied by the universal reign of death. "Death passed unto all men, for that all sinned." Death, with its attendant terrors of pain and sickness and decay and horror, became the heritage of sinful man. And so God's gracious purpose was reversed by the act of man himself using the very gift of moral freedom, which was his most glorious, most God-like endowment, against the Giver. "God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity. Nevertheless, through envy of the devil came death into the world; and they that do hold of his side do find it."

2. Let us, next, consider what has been revealed as to the restoration to the human race of that righteousness which it lost in Adam. No remedy could be adequate which did not recognize or take into account the unity of the race; if the whole race, and nothing less, was involved in the trespass of its first head, the whole race, and nothing less, must be made to share in the re-

storation; if the whole race, and nothing less, has incurred the penalty, then by the whole race, and by nothing less, must the penalty be paid. And so we are led to the suggestion that the possibility of restoration, the possibility of the payment of the penalty, may lie in the very means through which and through whom the disaster came. We are led to see that what was needed was the gathering up of the race into a new head in whom it might find that righteousness which it ought to have found in the first, and in whom it might pay the penalty which by the trespass of the first it had incurred; we are led to see that, if there could be found a Head in whom the race might be as really one as it was in Adam, therein might lie the hope and means of its recovery. Could any such be found? Could there be one who, whilst really and truly and wholly Man, might be righteous, might be without that fault and corruption of the nature of every man which naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam? And, if such there were, could his righteousness be shared by all his brethren, could he and would he, as the true representative of all his brethren, pay the uttermost penalty of their sin, could he and would he abolish death, and triumph over him who alone could make death terrible?

We know the answer. Adam was in very truth 'the figure of him that was to come." God provided a new Head for our race. God did not despise the work of His own hands. Through human flesh and blood had come the failure, through human flesh and blood came the recovery. Adam was really the figure, the type, of Christ; Christ was really the anti-type of Adam.

¶ Mankind has found a Saviour and a Representative; the acts of His life on earth were representative acts. It is true that this is only one aspect of His life, and that we must not forget that aspect of it in which it is to be viewed as representing God to man even while for our present purpose we rather view it as representing man to God. So viewed we can see the tremendous significance of every single act as being, according to the teaching of St. Paul, the act of the whole human race, and we can understand, at least to some extent, the detailed obsecrations of the Litany in which the suppliant Church pleads the redemptive efficacy of the acts of the Second Adam as offered on behalf of the whole race. In Him as Bone of its bone and Flesh of its flesh the human race rendered a perfect obedience, was tempted and

conquered temptation, died and rose from death, and ascended into the heavens whence the trespass of the First Adam had shut it out. He bore the penalty of sin not merely as man's substitute, but as his representative as well; in Him mankind was so truly gathered up that it could claim His acts as in very deed its own. Mankind in Him retrieved its disaster and paid its debt, and that to the very last mite; in the agony and bloody sweat, in the cry of utter desolation on the Cross, Mankind was bearing its burden and suffering its penalty, in Him who, being what He was, could fully satisfy the Divine Justice and yet perfectly express the Divine love.[1]

¶ I see two revelations in the crucified life of Jesus: (1) the manifestation of God's love, (2) the redemption of the race out of death. He, as the Second Adam, fulfilled the Law by the filial surrender of His will to the Father's. We inherit that surrender in our spiritual conditions from the Second Adam, even as we inherit the transgression from the First Adam in our natural conditions. I venture to feel that our Lord's obedience gave the race a new standing. The manifestation of the Father's love is seen, to use St. Paul's words, (1) in not reckoning the offence of the world, (2) in reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. v. 19).

The New Creation is Oneness with the Fount of all law; not obedience to the enactments of law, but fellowship with the Spirit or Source of law itself. The Holy Ghost is the power of this consciousness realized in our Lord Jesus Christ quickening or realizing the same consciousness in the hearts of such as believe in the glorified Humanity: that is to say, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ the race is glorified, is in full consciousness with the Supreme or Most High God.[2]

3. Adam, then, is "the figure of him that was to come," the figure of our perfection, and of our ruin and mortality; the figure of God's intention, of what man has spoiled and God repaired. We may measure the reality of the deliverance by the reality, which we know, of the wreck; we may measure the vastness of what was wrecked by the greatness of the remedy. And so the world is changed, and what might but be guessed at before is made certain now. We are of a race that had lost its way; and now we know it. We are of a race whose prospects and destiny it is vain to circumscribe by what we see; it belongs to a world

[1] H. V. S. Eck.

[2] R. W. Corbet, *Letters from a Mystic of the Present Day*, 36.

to which this world cannot reach, and where we are linked with God. So even the First Man dared to imagine before the Second came; but he knew not, and all the practical energy of his nature was directed here. He went forth and did great things. As it is said in those great Choruses which are the Psalms of Heathenism, he subdued the earth, he founded states, he sought out arts, he mastered powers living and powers elemental, he found the secret of beauty and the spell of words, and the power of numbers, and the fine threads that waken and order thought; he made the world his workshop, his arsenal, his palace; generation after generation he learned to know more of its inexhaustible gifts; his eye was more opened, his sense more delicate, his hand more crafty; he created, he measured, he gathered together, he enjoyed. He is before us now, in his greatness, his hopes, his pride, with even nobler aims and vaster tasks, alleviating misery, curing injustice, bridling or extinguishing disease. But still he is the First Man; of the riddle of his nature he has not the key, and despairs of reaching it; he passes in his greatness, and never continues in one stay; sorrow and decay baffle him, sin entangles him, and at the end is death. "Of the earth, earthy"; of the earth, bounded by its barriers, invisible, impassable.

And now, side by side with him, is the Second Man, from the Manger, the Cross, the Grave,—dead, yet alive, and alive forever; attended by His train of sanctities, by unthought-of revelations of heart, by the "things of the Spirit," by hopes and peace which for this world were an idle dream, by the new Beatitudes. He comes in the greatness of His strength, He comes in weakness: but strength and weakness to Him are both alike; for love, which is of God, in strong and weak, is the life of the new creation, its "one thing needful," the essential mark of its presence. So He comes, on the bed of sickness, in the lifelong burden, in the broken heart; with the children in spirit, the poor, the feeble, the helpless, the unknown; with the sorrows of penitence, the hunger after righteousness, the longings to be true, the longings to be pure, the joy of forgiveness, the hope that is for the other side of the grave. Strange attendants for the company of the Deliverer; but they bring with them the victory which nothing else has gained. "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the Second Man is the Lord from heaven."

¶ Now it is a plain, manifest Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, that Man by the Fall is in such a condition that there was no help or Remedy for him either in the Height above, or in the Depth below, but by the Son of God's becoming incarnate, and taking the fallen Nature upon Him. If this *alone* could be the Remedy, does not this enough shew us the Disease? Does not this speak plainly enough *what* it was that Man had lost by his Fall, namely, the Birth of the Son of God in his Soul; and therefore it was that only the Son of God, in so mysterious a manner, could be his Redeemer? If he had lost *less*, a less power could have redeemed him. If he had lost something else, the Restoration of that something would have been his Redemption. But since it is an open, undeniable Doctrine of the Gospel, that there can be no Salvation for Mankind but in the Name and by the Power of the Son of God, by His being united to the fallen Nature, and so raising His own Birth and Life in it, is it not sufficiently declared to us that what was lost by the Fall, was the Birth of the Son of God in the Soul?[1]

¶ I have tried again and again; and have fallen to pieces in failure. I remain face to face with the sense of impossibility and shame. Is it so? Then, and for this cause, instead of turning away in disappointment and despair, I will creep so much the nearer, and in lowlier confession of helplessness, towards that Cross of Christ, which, as I need it more vitally and more totally, will become more and more the one yearning and hope of my heart. The failures which drive me back with sadder but more earnest dependence, to a strength and conquest which are not in me, shall after all be made to minister, not to my ruin, but to my purification. If more and more my heart and my faith be on Him, though every resolve and effort of mine seem to fail, His presence in me shall be, even in my weakness, strength: His presence in me, embraced more and more under pressure of what would otherwise be despair, shall, in my uttermost inanition of self, be found to be Divine victory—the victory of Almighty Goodness and Love.[2]

That Eden of earth's sunrise cannot vie
With Paradise beyond her sunset sky
Hidden on high.

Four rivers watered Eden in her bliss,
But Paradise hath One which perfect is
In sweetness.

[1] William Law. [2] R. C. Moberly.

Eden had gold, but Paradise hath gold
Like unto glass of splendours manifold
Tongue hath not told.

Eden had sun and moon to make her bright;
But Paradise hath God and Lamb for light,
And hath no night.

Unspotted innocence was Eden's best;
Great Paradise shows God's fulfilled behest,
Triumph and rest.

Hail, Eve and Adam, source of death and shame!
New life has sprung from death, and Jesu's Name
Clothes you with fame.

Hail Adam and hail Eve! your children rise
And call you blessed, in their glad surmise
Of Paradise.[1]

III.

Adam as a Man.

The Ethical Interest.

Two things the Church of Christ has agreed to hold regarding Adam as an individual. They are of course true also of Adam as man, for they are true of all men. But they are to be taken by each individual and made a matter of conscience for himself.

1. The first thing is that having made man for ethical fellowship, God has entered into a covenant with him. On the side of man the condition is moral obedience, on God's side protection and love. Nothing can destroy the obligation on man's part to fulfil this covenant—no plea of original sin, no argument from the solidarity of the race. Under all circumstances and on every man lies the obligation to "keep the commandments." Now we see this obligation in its simplest form in Adam. Fellowship with God is emphasized as the one blessedness of his life, and the condition of fellowship is obedience to the law of God, expressed on the heart and conscience.

[1] Christina G. Rossetti, *Some Feasts and Fasts.*

¶ Providence has called me to be the witness [in Rome] of a most interesting scene lately—the death of a poor Swiss artist, a peaceful and faithful follower of Christ. His lungs had been attacked some years ago. The winter was very severe, and the health of this poor man (I should not say *poor*, for he is rich), evidently declined apace. He was without friends, without comforts, without sleep, for whenever he lay down the cough seized him, and in a country whose language was strange to him; but he was not without God, and God was to him friends, and comfort, and rest, and home. I arrived here about the middle of February, and got acquainted with him, and saw him occasionally. He could go about and walk a little then, and he used to come and sit with Mr. Noel and me from time to time; and we always found him most edifying, as far as his extreme modesty would permit him to communicate to us his Christian experience. For long, he had been much in the habit of living much alone, and of speaking more to God than to man; and this high intercourse had left its traces on him—its blessed traces of holiness and peace. As the spring advanced, he got worse and weaker, and in April he became unable to leave his room. I saw a great deal of him then. He used to tell me that his sleepless nights were delightful opportunities of communion with God. The joy which filled his heart received very little abatement from his disease. On the day before his death he told me that he had had moments that day which he could not express—"des moments inexprimables." "You who are in health," he said, "can scarcely conceive the manifestations which God makes to His people as they stand on the brink of the grave." He has finished his course, and kept the faith, and received the crown.[1]

I seek not of Thine Eden-land
  The forms and hues to know,—
What trees in mystic order stand,
  What strange, sweet waters flow;

What duties fill the heavenly day,
  Or converse glad and kind;
Or how along each shining way
  The bright processions wind.

Oh joy! to hear with sense new born
  The angels' greeting strains,
And sweet to see the first fair morn
  Gild the celestial plains.

[1] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, i. 61.

But sweeter far to trust in Thee
While all is yet unknown,
And through the death-dark cheerily
To walk with Thee alone!

In Thee my powers, my treasures live;
To Thee my life shall tend;
Giving Thyself, Thou all dost give,
O soul-sufficing Friend.

And wherefore should I seek above
The city in the sky?
Since firm in faith and deep in love
Its broad foundations lie;

Since in a life of peace and prayer,
Not known on earth, nor praised,
By humblest toil, by ceaseless care,
Its holy towers are raised.

Where pain the soul hath purified,
And penitence hath shriven,
And truth is crowned and glorified,
There—only there—is Heaven.[1]

2. The second thing is that disobedience issues in death. There are three kinds of death—physical, social, spiritual. Physical death, the death of the body, is the result of disobedience in so far as it is painful or premature. Social death, or the loss of fellowship between man and man, is due to disobedience, because it is sin that is the occasion of all estrangement. Spiritual death is the loss of God's favour and friendship. This, the greatest thing, covering the rest, is made most prominent in the story of the Fall.

¶ There is a delightful passage in the Personal Reminiscences of Carmen Sylva, the Queen of Roumania, which shows that while death, physical, social, and spiritual, finds its sting in disobedience, that sting may by obedience be so removed that spiritual and social death are annihilated, while physical death becomes natural and welcome. Speaking of Fraulein von Bunsen, Carmen Sylva says: By her perfect submission to the Divine Will, her firm

[1] Eliza Scudder, *Hymns and Sonnets.*

faith which no doubt had ever clouded, no less than by her unswerving fidelity in friendship, and the cheerful sunny temperament that had in it something of the playfulness and simplicity of a child, Aunt Mim (as we called her) was the pearl of her whole family and became invaluable and indispensable to ours. In those hours of greatest suffering, when words of good cheer could no more avail, then her quiet sympathy would yet often find means of making life a little more endurable to the poor sick child, of distracting my father's thoughts from present sadness. Only one so utterly detached from all thoughts of self could have refreshed and lightened that atmosphere of gloom. So heavily did it press at times on my childish mind, and so thoroughly had my mother inculcated the belief in death as the supreme good to be wished and desired by us all, as the sole release from pain and suffering for ourselves and others, that during the weeks in which, after my brother Otto's birth, she lay between life and death, my governess often heard me praying that God would take her to Himself! It caused some perplexity, I believe, to her who heard this singular prayer, to hit on the right method of bringing me to desist from it, without disturbing the effect of the maternal teaching, and she wisely contented herself with telling me that although it would doubtless be for Mamma's happiness to go to heaven, I need not ask for this, as God would take her to Himself in His own good time, and that moreover I should then see her no more. I was very much astonished at this, never having for a moment contemplated the possibility of being deprived of my mother's presence by death. My idea of heaven was of something so real and near that whenever I gazed up into the blue sky, I felt sure that, were my beloved ones there, I might at any moment see a little window opening to let me through to join them! Well is it with us, if we can keep this belief through life; if like children, who have left their heavenly home too recently to accustom themselves to this earth, and could depart again from it without a pang, we can but bear in mind during the whole course of our dreary pilgrimage, that we have here no abiding place, and keep our hopes fixed on the life beyond![1]

¶ This is how the biography of Charles Kingsley ends: "Death is not death, then, if it kills no part of us save that which hindered us from perfect life. Death is not death, if it raises us from darkness into light, from weakness into strength, from sinfulness into holiness. Death is not death, if it brings us nearer to Christ, who is the fount of life. Death is not death, if it perfects our faith by sight, and lets us behold Him in whom we

[1] *From Memory's Shrine*, Personal Reminiscences of Carmen Sylva (1912), 127.

have believed. Death is not death, if it gives to us those whom we have loved and lost, for whom we have lived, for whom we long to live again. Death is not death, if it rids us of doubt and fear, of chance and change, of space and time, and all which space and time bring forth, and then destroy. Death is not death; for Christ has conquered death, for Himself, and for those who trust in Him. And to those who say, 'You were born in Time, and in Time you must die, as all other creatures do: Time is your king and Lord, as he has been of all the old worlds before this, and of all the races of beasts, whose bones and shells lie fossil in the rocks of a thousand generations'; then we can answer them in the words of the wise Poet, and in the name of Christ, who conquered death:

Fly, envious Time, till thou run out thy race,
Call on the lazy leaden-stepping hours
Whose speed is but the heavy Plummet's pace;
And glut thy self with what thy womb devours,
Which is no more than what is false and vain
And merely mortal dross;
So little is our loss,
So little is thy gain.
For when as each bad thing thou hast entomb'd,
And last of all, thy greedy self consum'd,
Then long Eternity shall greet our bliss
With an individual kiss;
And Joy shall overtake us as a flood,
When every thing that is sincerely good
And perfectly divine,
And Truth, and Peace, and Love shall ever shine
About the supreme Throne
Of Him, t'whose happy-making sight alone
When once our heaven'ly-guided soul shall climb,
Then all this Earthy grossness quit,
Attir'd with Stars, we shall for ever sit,
Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee O Time![1]

[1] *Life of Charles Kingsley*, ii. 356.

EVE.

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EVE.

And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.—Gen. ii. 23, 24.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.—Gen. iii. 6.

But she shall be saved through the childbearing.—1 Tim. ii. 15.

How are we to interpret the story of Adam and Eve, their creation and fall? Three different views have been held from the very earliest times and are still held to-day. The first is that we are to regard the early chapters of Genesis as history, genuine history—the Garden, the Tree, the Serpent—all actual history; the second, that we are to look upon it as myth, like the mythology, say of Greece, in which truth is embodied in a purely mythical form; the third, that it is to be treated, as the Apostle Paul treats certain incidents of Old Testament history, in an allegorical fashion, as an allegory, an interesting story that contains for us profound spiritual truth.

Each of these views has still its advocates, but the generally accepted view to-day is the third, viz.: that we have here not history but allegory, very much the same as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The City of Destruction never existed, yet it is most real: Christian, though only the product of Bunyan's sanctified imagination, is alive to-day in you and me, and will continue to live till the end of time.

¶ It is probable that no reader of the opening chapters of Genesis would, apart from dogmatic presuppositions, take the

story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden to be an historical narrative. Everything in it points to that large utterance of the primitive imagination, the poetry of the human mind when it begins to meditate upon its origins, which among the Greeks was described as myth. The word "myth" has in the modern mind an uneasy suggestion of falsehood and fabrication; and with a proper instinct we decline to apply any word with such a suggestion to the inspired writings. But what the Greeks signified by the *muthos* (Anglicé, "myth") was not a falsehood, nor, except in the sense that the highest work of the human mind may be designated by such a word, was it a fabrication. It was a tale, often rich in colour and moving in incident, which contained a deeper meaning than appeared. It was an attempt to convey a truth, a religious truth, or it might be even an historical truth, in the form of a story. Where the records or the memory of man could not penetrate, his imagination, guided by his reason, might make adventurous excursions; and truths which might be communicated in abstract language became more memorable, and therefore more efficacious, when they were "embodied in a tale."[1]

I.

The Wife.

1. Whenever, or however, the second chapter of Genesis was composed, it bears the hand-print of God in the conception of woman being the companion, the helpmeet for man; "answering to him," as the margin puts it. Here, at once, is the truth which Israel never understood—there is hardly any trace of its influence in the Patriarchal polygamy, in the Mosaic Law, or even in the chance references of the prophets. It gleams in an occasional passage of the Proverbs and in the Song of Songs. But it disappears in the Rabbinical literature, which uniformly treats woman as an inferior. And it comes to its own only when Christianity fulfils the law. The beautiful relations between man and wife in modern Judaism may be traced rather to the Christian influences, which the best Jews do not now even seek to escape, than to a late understanding of this opening page of the Bible. Our Lord set His seal to this Divine message when He took the primitive story of Eden to correct even the legisla-

[1] R. F. Horton.

tion of Moses; and He placed the inspiration of the passage beyond all question for the Christian, when He incorporated its lesson in His own New Law: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." In the thought of God, man is incomplete alone: "Male and female created he them" (Gen. i. 27). In the vision of Christ, that unity of male and female would pass into a spiritual form among the angels of God in heaven; for in Him there is no male or female; but, according to His own word, man and wife are inseparable, the complement of one another, forming only in their union the ideal human being. Out of this truth—surely a truth of revelation, a truth established not by the story of Eden, with the sad fall and deception of the woman who was to the man bone of his bone, but by the Spirit of God instructing and directing the human race—grows the sanctity of marriage, and that ideal mystical relation of man and wife on which all high civilization and permanent progress depend. It is a lesson well written in the forefront of all religious teaching.

¶ When the man looks upon the woman for the first time, as she is presented to him by God, his surprise and gladness break into verse. Yes, the first poem in the Bible—that is, the first music of metrical speech—is occasioned by that event which wakens most of our great poets to essay their first songs, and which brings rude efforts at verse from even the least poetical; it is a love-poem. I am tempted, strange as it may sound, to transcribe in English letters this beautiful verse, and to throw it into an English metre, in order to convince the reader of this fine point in the creation-story. Adam said:

Zôth happa-am ezem meazamai
Ubasar mibsarai, lezôth yikkare isshah
Chi me-ish lokochah zôth.

That is Hebrew poetry; the balanced clauses, the exalted phraseology by which the Hebrew distinguishes poetry from prose. The best literal version of our Bible gives no suggestion of this. But perhaps we may bring it out by a slight expansion. And Adam said:

She, she is bone of my bone,
  And flesh of my flesh is she;
Woman her name, which is grown
  Out of man, out of me.

She stands therefore before him, the poetry of life, at once a dream and a reality, a revelation of the ideal, a creation of the real. No breath of impurity has passed upon man or woman; they stand together, the loftiest thought in the ascending scale of creation, the final goal of evolution. They need no garments, no adornments. In the deep and tender passion which is their mutual bond there is and can be no shame. As Phidias might strike an Aphrodite out of Parian marble, as Botticelli in his dreams might paint the goddess rising from the foam, pure as the Holy Virgin, so God makes the woman Eve, the life and love of the world, the consoler of the heart, the delight of the eyes, the companion of the soul, the kernel and centre of man. Let them cleave to one another; they are one. Let them not expect perfection in separation; but let them anticipate perfection, achieved through pure and faithful living here, in that union in which there will be no more male and female, but in their duality the only unity.[1]

¶ The highest state I define as that state through and in which men can know most of God, and work most for God: and this I assert to be the marriage state. He can know most of God, because it is through those family ties, and by those family names, that God reveals Himself to man, and reveals man's relations to Him. Fully to understand the meaning of "a Father in Heaven" we must be fathers ourselves; to know how Christ loved the Church, we must have wives to love, and love them; else why has God used those relations as symbols of the highest mysteries which we (on the Romish theory) are the more saintly the less we experience of them? And it is a historic fact, that just the theologic ideas which a celibate priesthood have been unable to realize in their teaching are those of the Father in Heaven—the Husband in Heaven. I will now only add an entreaty that you will forgive me if I have seemed too dogmatic. But God has showed me these things in an eventful and blissful marriage history, and woe to me if I preach them not.[2]

2. In the story of the formation of Eve from Adam's body (Gen. ii. 21–24), we have, says Driver, a wonderfully conceived allegory, designed, by a most significant figure, to set forth the moral and social relation of the sexes to each other, the dependence of woman upon man, her close relationship to him, and the foundation existing in nature for the attachment springing up between them, and for the feelings with which each should

[1] R. F. Horton.

[2] *Life of Charles Kingsley*, i. 154.

naturally regard the other. The woman is formed out of the man's side: hence it is the wife's natural duty to be at hand, ready at all times to be a "help" to her husband; it is the husband's natural duty ever to cherish and defend his wife, as part of his own self.

Let us appreciate the sublime truths which it implies regarding the dignity of woman and the sacredness of matrimony. Strong and mighty indeed must that tie be for whose sake man resigns all the fond associations of childhood; fervent must that love be which gains the ascendancy over the affection for father and mother. If the parents consider the son as the gift of God (Ps. cxxvii. 3), the son receives his wife as a special Divine gift (ver. 22). Many parents love their children more than all the world; the youth lavishes the whole wealth of his affections on her who sways his heart. The highest ideas of love, which are generally represented as the exclusive result of modern civilization, are plainly expressed in the affecting narration of these verses; they are not obscurely or vaguely hinted at; the Hebrew writer unfolds them with an emphasis which shows his earnestness, his decision.

¶ The relative characters and capabilities of man and woman are an instance in the moral world of the Divine wisdom—man loving to protect, woman to lean. Hence faith is more powerful in woman, not from her being less rational, but from her being more formed to rely. When woman becomes infidel it is often from having deified some man. Man passes through sights and sounds of sin and shakes them off, where women would be irretrievably stained. This also is suited to the place assigned them, and a reason why woman should not be thrust into many parts of life where man must venture. Even the seemingly unjust law in society which forgives man many things unpardonable in woman has a reason in it. She has more to break through, and it is harder to put her again where she was; the fruit of the forbidden tree is a deadlier poison to her. On woman, too, as the genius of the family, the social structure most depends, and when she sinks ruin is at hand. No sign of a nation perishing is so sure as the corruption of woman—Messalina was more ominous than Nero, Herodias than Herod.[1]

¶ We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the "superiority" of one sex to the other, as if they could be

[1] John Ker, *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, 2.

compared in similar things. Each has what the other has not; each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give. Now their separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial; to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and *always* hardened. But he guards the woman from this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence.[1]

II.

The Woman.

As a woman of independent will and individual responsibility, Eve comes before us first in the third chapter of Genesis, and that chapter is the story of the Fall. There Eve is representative of the temptation that assails man. As Adam is representative of man in the Creation, the primitive state, and the Fall, so Eve is representative in the story of the Fall of those temptations which every human being, male or female, has to meet.

1. The temptation was threefold, being addressed to the body, the soul, and the spirit. "When the woman saw (1) that the tree was good for food, and (2) that it was a delight to the eyes, and (3) that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Gen. iii. 6). So is it always. And so was it with Jesus. When we compare the temptations to which

[1] Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, § 67, 68 (*Works*, xviii. 121).

He had to submit, as recorded by St. Luke, we see at once that He had to submit to exactly the same temptations as Eve.

(1) Eve "saw that the tree was good for food"—it was a temptation addressed to the bodily appetites. So "when Jesus was afterward an hungered," the devil came to Him and said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."

(2) Again, Eve saw that the tree "was a delight to the eyes"—it was a temptation to the mind, to the sense of beauty, to the unlawful indulgence of those higher gifts of ear and eye which find their expression in science and in art. So also Christ was taken to the top of a high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, in a moment of time. "All these," said the devil, "will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." What an appeal the sight must have made to the mind of Christ. All knowledge and all beauty were comprehended in the vision. But knowledge that is gained without self-sacrifice is sin; and beauty that is divorced from truth is deformity. Many a man has become eminent in science and in art through the worship of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Christ will become eminent also, but only by obeying the precept, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

(3) Once more, Eve saw "that the tree was to be desired to make one wise." There is a wisdom or experience that can be reached by man. There is a higher wisdom or experience which belongs only to God. Eve was tempted to pass beyond the bounds of human experience—as the devil put it, to be as a God, knowing good and evil. This is the ambition which Shakespeare says was the temptation of the angels. It is the highest form of temptation that comes to man; it is the temptation to his spiritual nature. Christ was tempted spiritually also. He was placed on the pinnacle of the Temple, and told to cast Himself down. For was it not written that the angels had charge of Him, and that He would not dash His foot against a stone? It was the temptation to enter upon an experience to which as man He was not called. The wisdom that can arrest the laws of nature is wisdom that belongs to God. Christ will exercise that wisdom by and by, when He goes forth to do the work of the Atonement;

but now He is being tempted as a man, and He refuses to ask God to bear with Him while He undergoes an experience to which God has not called Him.

¶ The second picture of Watts's great trilogy of Eve represents the Temptation. It shows Eve with her face buried amid a profusion of leaves and flowers and fruit in the bowers of Eden, her hand touching the shell-like apple blossom, her nostril inhaling the fragrance of the fruit, and her mouth taking the fatal bite. God made man innocent and upright, and placed him in a world of beauty and brightness. Eden was the work of God, the pattern of His thought and purpose for man. And the remembrance of that fair Eden prevents man from forming dark thoughts of God, regarding the origin of evil. The root of sin is in man, not in God's world; and the evil that blighted Eden came from him and not from God. The temptation of Eve contains the germ and pattern of all temptation, and reveals the method by which it invariably carries on its baleful work. It shows how Satan succeeds by half-truths, when falsehoods on the one hand, and whole truths on the other, would be sure to fail. He insinuates a doubt as to whether our first parents understood aright the Divine prohibition regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "Yea, hath God said—ye shall not eat of every tree?" It is as if he had said, "Surely it is not possible that a wise and gracious Being could forbid so innocent an indulgence, and issue a prohibition for which no kind of reason can be given." He thus makes an indirect reflection upon the character of God, and causes the woman to think that He is not so good and wise as she supposed Him to be, seeing that He so seriously restricts the liberty of herself and her husband. She gives way to the temptation. She waxes bold enough to stretch forth her hand, to pluck the fruit of the forbidden tree and to eat of it. Sensuality, vanity, ambition lend their aid; doubt and distrust pass into open unbelief; and when her husband joined her, seduced by her example, and saw further than she saw at first, that Eve did not die from eating of the fruit, everything conspired to the fatal act of disobedience and ingratitude which, as Milton says, "brought death into the world and all our woe, with loss of Eden."[1]

2. The sin of Eve, if we may express it in a single sentence, was the seizing of that which did not belong to her, or did not belong to her yet. In time she might be wise as God to know good and evil. But at present there is mystery wrapped round

[1] Hugh Macmillan, *The Life-Work of George Frederick Watts*, 147.

the wisdom of God, and that mystery must be respected. More than that, the price must be paid. It is the experience of life, interpreted by the Spirit of God, that brings wisdom. Eve had not yet passed through that experience or paid that price. Life is the price, and, for us now at least, death is especially the price.

¶ "Sphœra cujus centrum ubique, circumferentia nullibus," was said of Mercury, that messenger of the gods who marshalled reluctant spirits to the Underworld; and for Mercury we may write Life with Death as its great sacrament of brotherhood and release, to be dreaded only as we dread to partake unworthily of great benefits. Like all sacraments it has its rightful time and due solemnities; the horror and sin of suicide lie in the presumption of free will, the forestalling of a gift—the sin of Eve in Paradise, who took that which might only be given at the hand of the Lord. It has too its physical pains, but they are those of a woman in travail, and we remember them no more for joy that a child-man is born into the world naked and not ashamed: beholding ourselves as we are we shall see also the leaves of the Tree of Life set for the healing of the nations.[1]

¶ It is an old story, that men sell themselves to the tempter, and sign a bond with their blood, because it is only to take effect at a distant day; then rush on to snatch the cup their souls thirst after with an impulse not the less savage because there is a dark shadow beside them for evermore. There is no short cut, no patent tram-road, to wisdom after all the centuries of invention; the soul's path lies through the thorny wilderness which must be still trodden in solitude, with bleeding feet, with sobs for help, as it was trodden by them of old time.[2]

¶ What is this sin of woman? Something antediluvian, you say. No, something intensely modern—a temptation which besets the woman of the twentieth century as much as it overshadowed the woman of the world's first day. That sin can be expressed in one word—extravagance. The word "extravagance" literally means "wandering beyond." It is inability to live within one's income. That was the sin of Eve; that is proverbially the sin of many of Eve's daughters. But you will observe that neither to Eve nor to her daughters does the sin present itself in its true colours. The act of the primitive woman is really an act of theft; she appropriates the possession of another. To live beyond one's income is always the appropriation of another's

[1] Michael Fairless, *The Roadmender* (1911), 79.
[2] George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil*.

possession. It is a trespass on somebody's tree under pretence of buying the fruit. But happily for Eve she is not consciously guilty of the fraud she is perpetrating. If the tempter had said, "Steal!" he would not have been listened to for a moment. But the tempter does not say, "Steal!" he says, "Speculate!" He says, "You are only buying the fruit after all; the increase of your resources will make you far more valuable to the master of the vineyard whom you serve; you will pay him back by and by in double work, in intelligent work, in remunerative work." Temptation since the days of Eden has never ceased to clothe itself in a seemly garment. The subtlety of the serpent does not lie in its stimulation of the passions, but in its pretence of being dispassionate—of not letting its own interest obscure the interest of the Divine. It ever paints the downward way as leading to an upward path which will issue in the elevation of the soul, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."[1]

III.

The Mother.

1. If it is the doom of woman by virtue of her spiritual leadership to involve mankind in sin, it is also her fate to bear in her person the penalties of the Fall. The knowledge of good and evil brings for the man toil—hard and unremitting toil—against a reluctant earth and the hostile elements which he must subdue. But in toil there is gladness. In vanquished obstacles there is exhilaration. If he is circled with a crown of thorns, the crown is transformed into a crown of kingship, and shines with the light of achievement. It is very different with Eve. For her the fatal knowledge brings the surrender of her crown to the man, who only after long ages will learn to look chivalrously on the prostrate form of her humiliation. And, worse even than this, her perennial service of motherhood is to be accomplished in travail and anguish to which man is a stranger. She is to be Eve, the mother of all living; she is to be also the *mater dolorosa*. The happy creatures of the forest and the field achieve their motherhood lightly; for her it is to be a peril, an inward anguish, a martyrdom.

[1] G. Matheson.

Eve stands in the dim doorway of history appealing to the generations of men: "Was there ever sorrow like unto my sorrow? I broke the charmed circle and led you into the knowledge of good and evil. Through me came the first dim movement of man towards his mysterious destiny. The serpent that tempts and haunts and would destroy the race involved me in his toils. And I bring forth children, and continue the race of man on the earth through travail and heavy sorrow."

One wept whose only child was dead,
New-born, ten years ago.
"Weep not; he is in bliss," they said.
She answered, "Even so.

Ten years ago was born in pain
A child, not now forlorn.
But oh, ten years ago, in vain,
A mother, a mother was born."[1]

2. It is not the manner of the Bible to expatiate on the familiar incidents of life; it tells the story in a style so pregnant that unless we expand it a little we may easily miss the full meaning. Thus in the names which Eve gives to her sons all the passionate hopes and sorrows of motherhood are revealed. Man is already fallen when the first birth takes place; the sorrows of conception are already the portion of the mother. But when the first birth takes place man is already expecting a redemption which God has promised, and the mother looks into the eyes of her firstborn with the eager query, Is this He? This thrilling truth is implied in the name which Eve gives to her child, though the curious timidity of translators will not allow us to understand her prophetic cry. Luther was bolder, and in his plain way ventured to render the words as they stand in the Hebrew Bible. The root of the name Cain signifies "to get" or "to possess." It is the sense of a vast possession, that inner opulence of motherhood, which dictates this first name. "I have gotten"—a treasure compared with which all things and creatures in this beautiful world seem nothing; even the lost Paradise is not so desirable as this little helpless babe.

¶ Women, mothers, of the wealthy classes! The salvation of

[1] Alice Meynell, *Poems* (1913), 107.

the men of our class from the evils they suffer from is only in your hands! Not the women who are busy with their waists, bustles, hair-dressing, and fascination for men, and against their will, by oversight, in despair bring forth children and turn them over to wet-nurses, nor those who attend to all kinds of lectures and talk of pyschomotor centres and differentiation, and also try to free themselves from bearing children, in order not to have any obstacle in their dulling of sensibilities, which they call development, but those in whose hands, more than in those of anybody else, lies the salvation of the men of our class from the calamities which are overwhelming them. You, women and mothers, who consciously submit to the law of God, you alone in our unfortunate, monstrous circle, which has lost the human semblance, know the whole real meaning of life according to God's will. You alone can by your example show to men that happiness of life in the submission to the will of God of which they deprive themselves. You alone know those raptures and joys which take hold of your whole being, and that bliss which is predetermined for man who does not depart from the law of God. You know the happiness of love for your husbands, a happiness which does not come to an end, nor break off, like all others, but forms the beginning of a new happiness of love for the babe. You alone know, when you are simple and submissive to the will of God, not that playful, parade work in uniforms and illuminated halls, which the men of your circle call work, but that true work which God has intended for men, and you know the true rewards for it and the bliss which it gives. You know the conditions of true labour, when with joy you await the approach and intensification of the most terrible agonies, after which there comes bliss which is known to you alone. You know this, when you without rest, without interruption, pass over to another series of labour and of sufferings, to nursing, when you at once reject and submit to your duty, to your feeling, the strongest human necessity, that of sleep, and for months and years at a time do not sleep through a single night, and frequently stay awake whole nights and with benumbed arms walk about and rock your sick babe, who is tearing your heart asunder. And when you do all this, unapproved and unseen by any one, expecting no praise and no reward from any one, when you do this not as an exploit, but as the servant of the gospel parable who comes back from the field, thinking you have but done what is right, you know what is the false parade work for people and what the real work for the fulfilment of God's will, the indications of which you feel in your heart.[1]

[1] Tolstoy, *What Shall We Do Then?* 333.

3. We see the joy over the firstborn, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." It is a modern mother's joy. The strong lusty child whom we christen Cain is always a prospect of gladness to the heart of motherhood; it seems to promise great things. Then comes Eve's second-born, and again there is struck a modern chord. We hear, not a mother's laughter, but a mother's sigh. It is no longer the lusty Cain. It is a feeble child—a child that to all seeming a zephyr will blow away. We detect the weeping in her voice as she calls him Abel—a name suggesting "a breath," "vapour," "vanity"—and we feel that her experience is repeated in a million maternal souls. Then in the course of years there comes what myriad mothers have seen repeated — the great reversal of the first maternal judgment. The child that woke her laughter becomes a disappointment, and the child that touched her pity becomes a glory. Cain is indeed a strong man, and Abel's life is indeed but a breath; but, for Eve and for the world, the short-lived breath of Abel effects more than the massive strength of Cain. We feel again that we are in presence of the moderns—that the primitive Garden in its fading has passed into the developed city, and that the woman has become one of us in the knowledge of good and evil.

¶ "A woman shall be saved through the childbearing," said St. Paul; not necessarily her own, but by participation in the great act of motherhood which is the crown and glory of her sex. She is the "prisoner of love," caught in a net of her own weaving; held fast by little hands which rule by impotence, pursued by feet the swifter for their faltering.[1]

¶ "Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." I am glad to see that the Revised Version leans to the mystical and evangelical interpretation of Paul's "childbearing." For, as Bishop Ellicott says, nothing could be more cold and jejune than the usual interpretation. And Paul is the last man to be cold and jejune on such a subject. Yes, I will believe with the learned Revisers, and with some of our deepest interpreters, that Paul has the seed of the woman in the eye of his mind in this passage, and that he looks back with deep pity and love on his hapless mother Eve; and then, after her, on all women and on all mothers, and sees them all saved, with Eve and with Mary, by

[1] Michael Fairless, *The Roadmender* (1911), 110.

the Man that Mary got from the Lord, if they abide and continue in faith, in love, in holiness, and in sober-mindedness.[1]

The legend says: In Paradise
  God gave the world to man. Ah me!
The woman lifted up her eyes:
  "Woman, I have but tears for thee."
But tears? And she began to shed,
Thereat, the tears that comforted.

(No other beautiful woman breathed,
  No rival among men had he.
The seraph's sword of fire was sheathed,
  The golden fruit hung on the tree.
Her lord was lord of all the earth,
Wherein no child had wailed its birth.)

"Tears to a bride?" "Yea, therefore tears."
  "In Eden?" "Yea, and tears therefore."
Ah, bride in Eden, there were fears
  In the first blush your young cheek wore,
Lest that first kiss had been too sweet,
Lest Eden withered from your feet!

Mother of women! Did you see
  How brief your beauty, and how brief,
Therefore, the love of it must be,
  In that first garden, that first grief?
Did those first drops of sorrow fall
To move God's pity for us all?[2]

[1] A. Whyte, *Bible Characters*: Adam to Achan, 33.
[2] Sarah M. B. Piatt.

CAIN.

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CAIN.

Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother.—1 John iii. 12.

WHETHER the narrative of Genesis presupposes acquaintance with facts which have not been narrated, or omits to give particulars of seemingly important elements in the story, the conclusion which we draw from the structure of the narrative is the same. The peculiarities of the structure are due to the purpose which the narrator had in view. That purpose is not to reproduce in full the whole substance of the early Hebrew traditions respecting the history of primeval man. His purpose is rather to select from them just such incidents as will most simply and effectively illustrate the teaching of the Israelite religion respecting the attributes of their God and the nature of man; such, too, as will exemplify the steps by which primitive man declined from his true calling into righteousness, and by which the selection of the chosen family and nation came to be ordained as the only means of the ultimate restoration of the human race. The narrator's purpose, both in selecting the story and in condensing or embellishing it, is a truly prophetic one; he makes known the "Torah" or teaching of the Lord, "being moved by the Holy Ghost."

For this reason, the story is not to be regarded as having been preserved to us, either in its original fulness or in exact continuity with that which precedes and follows. On the other hand, if the claim be made that the actual origin of the story is to be traced back to the recollection, in the people's consciousness, of the unceasing collision between the agricultural and the pastoral elements in prehistoric man, and of the dominance asserted by the former, it is not part of our province here to investigate the merits of such a plea. Neither that nor any archæological clue, however interesting to modern ethnological research, was present to the

mind of the Israelite narrator to whom we owe the preservation of the story. What his purpose was in selecting it and assimilating it to the requirements of his people's religion appears more or less clearly from the truths which the narrator so clearly brings to light. So clearly, indeed, do they stand out that they will have occurred to the majority of readers. The religious teaching conveyed by the story of Cain and Abel relates to the subjects of sin, man's fallen nature, and the attitude of the Almighty towards the sinner.

I.

The Sacrifice.

Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.—Gen. iv. 2-5.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.—Heb. xi. 4.

1. Here are two kinds of offerings made to God. One is vegetable, and one is animal; one is acceptable to God, one is not. God sets His seal of approbation on one form of sacrifice, He rejects the other. What is the reason? The writer of the Hebrews explains it. He says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent (that is, a fuller and more complete sacrifice) than Cain." There we strike on the first great principle of sacrifice. The value of the offering depends not on the character of the offering itself. It depends on the character of the offerer. It is not the sacrifice, it is the man who makes it, that gives it efficacy with God.

Now that is a very simple thing to us. But long ago it was a revolutionary thought. As far back as we can trace sacrifice, man's ideas about it were something like this: Its efficacy depended on its costliness. Hence was reached the terrible thought that the human life, being the highest and costliest of all, would therefore be most acceptable to God.

But when we turn to the Bible, we find this reversed every-

where. Sacrifice is made effective not by the offering but by the offerer. It took ages for this lesson to be burnt into the conscience of Israel. Israel was surrounded by nations that believed and practised the opposite. These nations sought to placate their gods by the number and value of their gifts, while their own moral character was steeped in the vilest immoralities. Israel was often tempted into similar conduct. Over and over again Israel had to be taught that mercy and obedience are what make the sacrifices acceptable to Jehovah. Without moral character even the costliest are an abomination. One of the earliest historic instances of this teaching is the answer which Micah represents Balaam as giving to Balak. The Moabitish king desires to know how he shall please Jehovah and win Him to his side. "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" In other words, can we win the Divine life or favour by increasing the number or the preciousness of animals or human victims? No. God's favour is not won thus. It depends on ourselves, on our own heart and moral character. The reply put into the mouth of the prophet is, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" So in many other passages.

Here, then, in this very early account of sacrifice we get one of its essential principles. It depends for its efficacy on moral disposition. It depends on submission to the will of God. If it were presented by those who had love neither for God nor for man, but who only desired to secure themselves in a life of self-pleasing, then the ritual and the offering, and everything connected with it, no matter how gorgeous, or costly, became an abomination to God.

¶ The acceptance of the offering depends on the acceptance of the offerer. God had respect to Abel and his offering—the man first and then the offering. God looks through the offering to the state of soul from which it proceeds; or even, as the words would indicate, sees the soul first and judges and treats the offering according to the inward disposition. God does not judge of what you are by what you say to Him or do for Him; He judges what you say to Him and do for Him by what you are.[1]

[1] Marcus Dods.

2. We are not expressly informed what was the exact motive or inducement in the case of the offering of the first-fruits of the land, but we are assured that the motive was wanting in all the essential requisites that constitute rectitude and purity of intent in the sight of God. Formality of profession, a sense of the propriety of outward decorum, a feeling of rivalry in regard to Abel, worldly interest, pride—these, and such like earthly motives, may have had the principal sway with Cain in inducing him to present his offering before the Lord. Cain lacked the faith of Abel, whose faith was something more than a belief of the natural man in a Creator, who argues from the design manifested in creation that there must be a Designer, and from the character of the works of nature that the Designer must be God. Cain was content with a faith of this extent—a barren faith, the faith of the worldling.

¶ "By faith" Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice, and for want of faith Cain did not. And what was that want of faith? In that Cain chose to give fruit instead of an animal? Not a bit of it. Faith is not a superficial thing. Its presence is not to be looked for in physical presentations or actions; it is a thing of the heart. Abel's heart was God's; Cain's heart was not. The one sacrifice was genuine; the other was a sham. God won't be befooled; that is what it means.[1]

II.

The Sin.

And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?—Gen. iv. 8, 9.

1. It is not to be supposed that the refusal of Cain's sacrifice was the cause of his crime. That one incident could not have changed his character. He must have had a predisposition to sin. We are not informed of the precise nature of his wickedness previous to his act of fratricide; nor could it do us any good to know it. The exact course of sin men pursue depends upon their tastes, training, circumstances, and temptations.

[1] W. G. Elmslie.

Apart from God, an unrenewed heart must lead us into ways that are evil: it does not matter, in regard to the acceptance of our worship, whether our sins be refined or gross, secret or open. If any form of iniquity is cherished within, or any kind of unrighteousness is persisted in, our prayers and praises will not reach the ears of our heavenly Father.

2. But sin tends to develop sin. Like all other forms of character, sin grows. Never for an hour is it at a standstill. No soul can live in eternal infancy. One sin begets another sin. Nothing else in nature is so prolific. One sin roots itself in the soil of character, and spreads itself outward, and lifts itself heavenward defiantly. Sin penetrates the underground of character, and forms there hidden enormities and unconscious depths of passion. A man of long experience in sin is always a worse man than he seems to himself to be. The day of judgment is to be a day of fearful surprises and overwhelming revolutions in self-knowledge.

(1) When Cain went in the joy of harvest and offered his first-fruits no thought may have been further from his mind than murder. It may have come as suddenly on himself as on the unsuspecting Abel, but the germ was in him. Great sins are not so sudden as they seem. Familiarity with evil thought ripens us for evil action; and a moment of passion, an hour's loss of self-control, a tempting occasion, may hurry us into irremediable evil.

The murder began by the side of that altar, when, as it is written, "He was wroth, and his countenance fell." Then he lifted the bludgeon to kill his brother; as the Scripture saith, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." Envy, jealousy, and bloody wrath were born within him at that moment, although the murder may not have been consummated for some time afterwards.

(2) We can hardly suppose that the man who has committed one crime—has stolen his neighbour's goods or taken away the life of a fellow-man—will scruple, in order to justify himself, to deny his crime or to violate another law to hide it. In the face of truth, right, and conscience, even in the face of the Omniscient, he will not hesitate to assert his innocence and defend himself. Thus when the Lord says to Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" he coolly and sullenly replies, "I know not." Though fresh from

the murder of his brother, his hands still reeking with his blood, the image of his mangled body still before his eyes, his ears full of his dying groans and unavailing prayers for life—the whole scene of horrid fratricide engraven on his soul—he coolly but falsely answers, "I know not." So strong is the fear of punishment inhering in guilt that we may doubt whether there is any baseness of falsehood to which it has not power to drive the guilty.

(3) It is this lie that leads us into the understanding of the answer, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer is not of itself self-revealing of the answerer. It is, as words go, a very simple and colourless question. But, following as it does a falsehood, it is really an intimation that Cain disdainfully throws off all sense of personal responsibility for his fellow-man. Then it is that God runs down the lie, and tells Cain that man is responsible for man, and that any one who disowns, neglects, or abuses such responsibility, walks the earth beneath His displeasure.

(4) Were we not so well acquainted with human nature and the history of mankind, we should think it strange that this incident comes so early in the history of the human race. But that acquaintance convinces us that to be true to human nature the Bible needed to have just such a story at just such a place in its records. For one of the deepest dispositions of the heart of man is to seek one's own pleasure and neglect the welfare of others, especially of such others as, for some reason, we feel are apart, are different from ourselves. It was for the man he had not fellowship with, the man between whom and himself there was lack of common ground, the man whose presence did not seem essential to his happiness—it was for such a man that Cain disavowed responsibility. And what Cain did, it has been the tendency of the very highest as well as the very lowest of the human race to do. The weak brother, the brother who interferes with our happiness, the brother whom we do not need that we may prosper, the man, whoever and wherever he may be, that we can afford to overlook, has been neglected and sometimes abused.

¶ Many years ago I was told of a priest who was called to visit a dying man. He heard his confession and prepared him for death, but the dying man said to him: "The one thing which troubles me more now even than the great sins of my life, is a

trick that I played when I was a boy. Not far from where I lived was a large common, in the middle of which two roads met, and at these cross-roads a rickety sign-post directed the traveller to his destination. The arms of the sign-post were loose, and one day, for fun, I took them down and changed them, so that they pointed out the wrong road; and now that years have rolled by and I am dying, it worries me greatly to think how many a poor, weary traveller across that common I sent on the wrong road."[1]

(5) It is perfectly clear that the responsibility of man for man is one of the axiomatic principles of our religion. It is assumed at the outset, as truly as the being of God is assumed and as the obligation of man to obey God is assumed. No proof is proffered of God's existence, no proof is proffered of man's obligation to obey God, nor is any proof proffered that man should regard the welfare of his fellow. Any mind that thinks is aware that if one member of society has disease, society as a whole is weakened through the weakness of that one member, and is aware, too, that if that disease is contagious or infectious, the whole community is in danger. If one member suffers, the whole body suffers. This law is so plain that he who runs may read it.

¶ The black plague in China unchecked will cause thousands of deaths in Europe from Italy to Norway. A foul spot left uncleaned in India may taint articles of adornment transferred to American homes. There cannot be one vicious life in any part of the world that is not a peril to the rest of the accessible world. As society enlarges from the village to the city, from the city to the nation, and from the nation to the whole earth, the interdependence of man on man for safety and well-being enlarges. To-day, with the intercommunication of products, ideas, customs from all parts of the earth, we are subject to influence from all people everywhere.[2]

(6) Christ Himself exemplified this principle of responsibility. It was the motive force that led Him to leave Heaven and come to earth. His heart noted the absence of all wanderers from safety; His feet followed such and His voice called to such. To Christ every human being was a brother in need, and whether the brother realized his need or cared to have it relieved, or was worthy to have effort made for him, did not affect Christ's actions;

[1] A. G. Mortimer, *Stories from Genesis*, 68.
[2] J. G. K. McClure, *Loyalty*, 76.

He was deeply, solicitously, and lovingly interested in every man, whatever the man's state of mind. As Christ felt toward others He expected His followers to feel toward them. Accordingly His followers made ministry to others their life-work, and when they did most for others, in the State, the nation, and the world, they best manifested the spirit and the wish of their Master.

¶ When Gregory the Great was Bishop of Rome, a beggar once died of hunger in the streets of the Eternal City. Am I my brother's keeper? he asked himself. He felt he could not avoid the true answer. One of the sheep committed to his care had been starved to death; his charity was shocked; his vigilance had failed; his sense of responsibility was outraged; and he imposed a severe penance on himself, and for many days actually lay under his own sentence of excommunication, performing no priestly act. This is the man who won the title of Great; this is the man who attained to the brilliant company of the Saints.[1]

III.

The Punishment.

My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the ground; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that whosoever findeth me shall slay me. . . . And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should smite him.—Gen. iv. 13-15.

1. When Cain said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear," what was the situation? What was the principal element in it? Mainly this—the presence of God with Cain after his sin. This, then, is the explanation of the sinner's suffering and pain. It is one and the same thing which creates the pain of the punishment and provides the hope of a happy issue—the presence of God with the sinner after he has sinned. And the first evidence of the presence of God is the acknowledgment of sin.

O crueller far than Cain,
Cain, ignorant of death
Till Abel lay there slain,
Who had not heard

[1] S. E. Cottam.

The yet unuttered word
From God's great breath,
"Thou shalt not kill:"—
O crueller far than Cain
Am I who still,
All knowing, stain the Rood
With innocent Blood.[1]

2. In the punishment of Cain there is mercy mingled with judgment. "The brand of Cain" has become an almost proverbial expression, but the sinister significance of the term is derived from a partial misapprehension of the episode related in the text. The Authorized Version of the Old Testament suggested that the fratricide was branded with some stigma which was at once a sign of his offence and a protection against the violence of the avenger of blood. This mark has been interpreted as being both a talisman against injury and a badge of disgrace, the stamp-mark of a wandering criminal for whom the death-sentence had been commuted into a decree of perpetual banishment. But the record of Genesis does not speak of the brand of Cain, but of a sign appointed by God. It was not a mark for the identification of the murderer, but a token of redemptive compassion and consideration on the part of God. What the token was we are not told, but its general character may be inferred from the records of guarantees of a similar nature which are given in the Old Testament. These signs of God's mercy were of various forms, but they all indicated His condescending presence and promise. The most universal of such tokens was the appointment of the rainbow as a sign that God would no more destroy all flesh with the waters of a flood. Gideon and others obtained signs from God as the assurance of His assistance and protection. In the same manner God appointed a sign for Cain which assured him that his life should be preserved inviolate by the shielding hand of God. The narrative also seems to imply that this sign of God's guardianship would assume, when occasion required, a perceptible and effectual shape, to warn the avenger that Cain's life was safeguarded by the mercy of God. We are familiar with the expression "the brand of Cain," and we are familiar with the bitter meaning of it as expressed by

[1] Wilfrid Meynell, *Verses and Reverses* (1913), 45.

Newman, but we must not think that that is its meaning as the word occurs in Genesis.

I bear upon my brow the sign
Of sorrow and of pain;
Alas! no hopeful cross is mine,
It is the brand of Cain.

The course of passion, and the fret
Of Godless hope and fear,—
Toil, care, and guilt,—their hues have set,
And fix'd their sternness there.

Saviour! wash out the imprinted shame;
That I no more may pine,
Sin's martyr, though not meet to claim
Thy cross, a saint of Thine.[1]

3. The wonder of God's grace is shown in the granting of a special redemptive sign to a murderer. It is difficult to conceive of a more startling representation of God's relation to a sinner. Here is one guilty of such an unspeakable crime that he is cursed from the fruit-bearing ground to be a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of the earth. The ground is still red with his brother's life which he has spilt. Yet the echoes of God's awful words, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground," have scarcely died away when we find God making a covenant of mercy with him, and hedging His judgment round with re-assuring signs of redemptive interposition. The gracious God is already making a covenant of mercy with Cain. It is the glory of God's grace to follow and pardon and save the chief of sinners. The redeeming God does not shrink from the touch of the grossly polluted soul, but rather is ready to receive it without delay into the fellowship of grace.

We are, perhaps, inclined to take a too superficial view of this matter; to work it out on the analogy of the law-courts and their processes. The sinner is in the dock; God, representing the law of righteousness, is on the bench; and one by one the man's sins pass before the Judge and the sinner and bear witness against him; and then the verdict: let him be beaten with many stripes. That is something like what we think; but that is to see

[1] J. H. Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions.*

the Divine method mirrored in an earthly mirror, and to forget what manner of men we are, and what is the nature of Him who sits in judgment over us. The world could never thus be saved from sin; this method is too superficial, too legalistic, too formalistic; it is not spiritual. You cannot idealize the process of the law-courts, and so reach the Divine method of dealing with sin; it is not the whole truth to say that God deals with the sinner as a judge would deal with a criminal, supposing the judge to embody perfect wisdom and perfect justice, and the man's crime to be utterly disclosed. Indeed it is very little of the truth to say that; for the most important elements in the situation as between God and the sinner are omitted. God is not simply an external authority sitting on a throne like a king, or on a judgment seat like a judge. He is the Divine Life that inheres in all that He has made; and therefore in a most real sense He Himself is in the sinner who is to be judged and punished for his sin. Again, a judge sits upon the bench simply as the embodiment of justice; he is there simply to see that the claims of justice are satisfied; his position means that; God, on the other hand, is perfect Justice; but God's perfect justice is simply an expression of perfect Love; and He judges, and punishes the sinner not simply that the claims of justice may be satisfied, but that the claims of love also may be satisfied. Again, when a judge gives a verdict he does so in the name of the law, and his function is ended when satisfaction has been rendered to the violated law; the ends of his office are served when the dignity of the violated law has been vindicated, whatever may happen to the criminal; but when God judges a sinner He does so in the name of Love, and His ends are not realized until the sinner is cleansed from his sin, and is worthily reconciled to the Father.

¶ If you feel in your conscience that you are as guilty as Cain, and if sins clamour around you which are as dangerous as his, and which cry out for judgment upon you, accept the assurance that the blood of Christ has a yet louder cry for mercy. If you had been Abel's murderer, would you have been justly afraid of God's anger? Be as sure of God's mercy now. If you had stood over his lifeless body and seen the earth refusing to cover his blood; if you felt the stain of it crimson on your conscience, and if by night you started from your sleep striving vainly to wash it from your hands; if by every token you felt

yourself exposed to a just punishment, your fear would be just and reasonable, were nothing else revealed to you. But there is another blood equally indelible, equally clamorous. In it you have in reality what is elsewhere pretended in fable, that the blood of the murdered man will not wash out, but through every cleansing oozes up again a dark stain on the oaken floor. This blood can really not be washed out, it cannot be covered up and hid from God's eye, its voice cannot be stifled, and its cry is all for mercy.[1]

In the wound of Thy right Hand
Each earthly toil I view;
By Thee my efforts stand,
Thine arm doth bring me through.
Hail, Holy Blood! Life-spring of every nerve,
Strengthen my heart to worship, will, and serve.

In Thy left Hand's purple stream
Each deed of love I lave,
Till of them all I deem
As steeped in that bright wave:
Hail, Holy Wounds, my worthless actions fill:
Upon their lifelessness Thy dews distil.

In Thy right Foot's holy scar
My spirit-vision sees
Dimly and from afar,
Thy human sympathies.
Lord, may Thy sacred Footprints day by day
Mark for our feet the true and perfect way!

In Thy left Foot's crimson track
Thy fainting steps I trace,
When Thou didst fetch me back,
A wanderer, from the waste:
Hail, sacred Feet that did the wine-press tread
Of Heaven's fierce wrath, and healing virtue shed.

In Thy loving Heart's red wound
Thy Church her cares may steep;—
Within its depths inhumed
May wait, and watch, and weep.
O, bleeding Lamb, our Saviour and our Guide,
Our all Thou art, and there is none beside!

[1] Marcus Dods.

ABEL.

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ABEL.

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.—Heb. xi. 4.

If we accept the Bible as authentic history, it carries us back into the ages prior to the Flood, right back, in fact, to the very starting-point of human life. Of course other nations, in fact almost all nations, have their stories of life anterior to the Deluge, and they no doubt represent more or less truthfully the facts. If any one says that these early stories of Genesis are, like the others, myths, that does not affect in the slightest the essential truths they contain. The parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan are not true in the sense that ordinary history is true. They are true only in the sphere of the soul, in the inner regions of human nature; and so it is possible to regard these early stories as Divine allegories, and still hold the great truths that lie in the heart of them.

The purpose of the author of the story of Cain and Abel is unquestionably a religious one. The number of things that will not fit together and the amount of difficulties that cannot be explained in it, prove that the writer had no intention of giving a complete and exact account of historical events. The same thing is true of all those early chapters in Genesis. If we read them right through, and allow our mind to take in the real impression that they are fitted to leave upon it, we will not doubt for a moment that the purpose of their construction is to declare great truths about God and the human heart. It is in this light that we now study the story of Abel.

I.

The Sacrifice.

Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.—Gen. iv. 2–5.

1. The first instance of worship subsequent to the Fall of which any Scriptural record has come down to us is described in the text. "The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." Here was a very notable distinction made between these primitive worshippers. And the question to be solved is, Whence did this distinction arise, or on what principle can we satisfactorily account for it? The question has been answered already under Cain; it must be answered independently here. For the right answer is the key to the life of each of these men, and the reason why their story is recorded.

(1) Now it is useless to seek an answer to this question in any supposed difference in the value of the things presented. In the sight of that great Lord to whom they were devoted, neither of the gifts had any intrinsic value. To Him they could not in any respect be profitable. If there were any difference between them in the judgment of God, we might with some plausibility have supposed that, of the two offerings, Abel's would have been the less acceptable, inasmuch as there seems at first sight to be something unnatural and incongruous, or, we may even say, something hateful and revolting, in the very attempt to conciliate the great God, whose tender mercies are over all His works, by deliberately putting to death an unoffending animal. On the other hand, as regards the worshippers themselves, we have not the least reason to think that there was any difference in the estimate they formed of the worth of their respective offerings; for if it be alleged that Cain, as being a husbandman, brought what was cheapest and easiest for him, "the fruit of the ground," it might with equal justice be said of Abel that he also, as being a shepherd, brought what was to him the least costly offering, when he sacrificed "the firstlings of his flock."

(2) Nor is there much force in the argument that Abel had more correctly performed the ritual of the offering; for at the best that only touches the outer framework of the story. As the narrator has given us the story, omitting the grounds of preference which in the earliest tradition may have been of the childish superficial character indicated by the above suggestions, or of a superstitious character, due to the polytheism of the primitive Hebrews, it is clear that he wishes himself to draw attention to the inner motives, and to the moral characters of the offerers, by which alone the value of their respective offerings could be really distinguished. This thought quite escaped the Septuagint translators, who seemed to suppose that the rebuke contained in verse 7 turned upon Cain's neglect to prepare his offering according to strict ceremonial requirements. The true insight into the matter is found in the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."

(3) Abel had the faith which enabled him to believe that "God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." His attitude towards God was sound; his life was a diligent seeking to please God; and from all such persons God gladly receives acknowledgment. When the offering is the true expression of the soul's gratitude, love, devotedness, then it is acceptable. When it is a merely external offering, that rather veils than expresses the real feeling; when it is not vivified and rendered significant by any spiritual act on the part of the worshipper, it is plainly of no effect.

¶ Wherein does Moses differ from Xerxes? Both alike lashed the sea; but Moses lashed it in the name of God. Wherein does Rahab differ from Aspasia? Both were harlots. Aspasia reasoned with philosophers; but Rahab trusted in the Divine covenant and let down from her window the scarlet thread Wherein was Samson better than Hercules? Did not both rend the jaws of lions? Aye; but the long braided locks of Samson were the token of his faith; shear those locks, and he is weak as other men.[1]

¶ Carlyle in his *Reminiscences* tells an incident in the life of a worthy of Ecclefechan, in whom the spirit of Abel was shown.

[1] D. J. Burrell, *The Church in the Fort*, 227.

"Old David Hope, that was his name, lived on a little farm close by Solway Shore, a mile or two east of Annan. A wet country, with late harvests; which (as in this year 1866) are sometimes incredibly difficult to save. Ten days continuously pouring; then a day, perhaps two days, of drought, part of them it may be of roaring wind,—during which the moments are golden for you (and perhaps you had better work all night), as presently there will be deluges again. David's stuff, one such morning, was all standing dry again, ready to be saved still, if he stood to it, which was much his intention. Breakfast (wholesome hasty porridge) was soon over; and next in course came family worship, what they call 'Taking the Book' (or Books, *i.e.* taking your *Bibles*, Psalm and Chapter always part of the service): David was putting on his spectacles, when somebody rushed in, 'Such a raging wind risen; will drive the *stooks* (shocks) into the sea if let alone!' 'Wind!' answered David, 'Wind cannot get ae straw that has been appointed mine; sit down, and let us worship God' (that rides in the whirlwind)!"[1]

2. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." By faith Abel was accepted of the Lord, by faith he suffered a martyr's death. We have here an illustration of the power of faith. This is the differentiating line which runs through all human life, to separate the dying from the immortal. Faith is living among realities. It is putting things at their proper relative value. It is placing the emphasis on facts as against fancies, on realities as against phantasms. It is making room for God and giving Him His proper place in the economy of life.

(1) *Faith, and faith alone, brings a man into touch with God.*—The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering because Abel had faith. There was no other way of approach to God then, and there is no other way now. It is written, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." It is a glorious truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and that His blood cleanseth from all sin. But what signifies this to any one who has not faith in Him? Without faith Christ shall profit us nothing. We may have prayed. We may have read the Bible. We may have sat at the Table of the Lord. We may have been zealous as the

[1] Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ii. 10.

Apostle Paul. Yet if we lack personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour "we are yet in our sins." By faith alone can we come to God.

(2) *Through faith in God we can do all things.*—To bring one's soul into line with the Divine will is to find oneself, and to assume an attitude of power. Those who have done great things in the kingdom of grace have invariably been men of great faith. Had they not been so, the works they accomplished would never have been undertaken. Unbelief always says, "It cannot be done! There is no use trying! It is sure to fail! There is no use going to speak to that man about his soul. He has continued too long in his sinful course, and is too hardened in heart. He would only laugh at you." Faith says, "I know I cannot change that man's heart, but God can—God is stronger than the devil any day. And if I can only go to Him with a strong enough faith, I go with all the power of God behind me." Faith links my weakness to God's omnipotence. And so it comes to pass that miracles of grace are achieved by the weakest and most unlikely agents.

¶ It is true that over and over again God has used men utterly weak and foolish and despised in the light of life's common standards. He wants men of the best mental strength, of the finest mental training, and He uses such when they are willing to be used, and governed by the true God-standards of life. But talent seems specially beset with temptation. The very power to do great things seems often to bewilder the man possessing it. Wrong ambition gets the saddle and reins and the whip too, and rides hard. Frequently some man who had not guessed he had talent, born in some lonely walk of life, without the training of the schools, is used for special leadership. It takes longer time always. Early mental training is an enormous advantage. Carey the cobbler had mental talents to grace a Cambridge chair. It took a little longer time to get him into shape for the pioneer work he did in India. Duff's training gave him a great advantage. But God is never in a hurry. He can wait. What He asks is that we shall bring the best we have natively, with the best possible training, and let Him use us absolutely as He may wish. And always remember that every mental power is a gift from Him; that actual power in life must be through Him only; and that mental gifts are not serviceable save as they are ever in-breathed by His own Spirit.[1]

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Service*, 232.

She can pluck mountains from their rooted thrones,
And hurl them into ocean; and from pain,
And prisons, and contempt extort the palm
Of everlasting triumph. She doth tread
Upon the neck of pride, like the free wind
On angry ocean. Lo! with step erect
She walks o'er whirlpool, waves, and martyr fires
And depths of darkness and chaotic voids;
Dissolving worlds, rent heavens, and dying suns;
Yea, and o'er paradises of earth's bliss,
And oceans of earth's gold, and pyramids
And temples of earth's glory: all these pave
Her conquering path to heaven—all these she spurns
With feet fire-shod, because her hand is placed
Immoveably in God's; her eye doth rest
Unchangeable on His; nor will she stop
Till, having crossed the stormy waves of pain
And fiery trial, she may lay her head
Upon her Father's breast, and take the crown
From love's rejoicing hand.

II.

The Death.

And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.—Gen. iv. 8.

And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.—1 John iii. 12.

He being dead yet speaketh.—Heb. xi. 4.

1. The direct cause of Abel's death, as we are told, was his righteousness—"And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Here was the consummation of Abel's faith. By faith he offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain; by faith he was accounted worthier to die. It was a fact pregnant with awful meaning for the future, that the first righteous man in Adam's family should also have become the first martyr to righteousness; yet it was not without hope, since Heaven distinctly identified itself with his testimony, and espoused the cause of injured rectitude and worth. In such a case, the ascendancy of evil could not be more than temporary.

¶ To speak of Abel as the first martyr to righteousness is to recall a striking incident in which the same word was used of Mazzini, the Italian patriot. Carlyle was out of touch with some of Mazzini's aspirations, and indeed they had recently quarrelled over them. Yet when Mazzini was unfairly attacked in England, Carlyle wrote to the *Times* in his defence. This is the letter:

"Whatever I may think of his practical insight and skill in worldly affairs, I can with great freedom testify to all men, that he, if I have ever seen such, is a man of genius and virtue, a man of sterling veracity, humanity, and nobleness of mind, one of those rare men, numerable unfortunately but as units in this world, who are worthy to be called martyr souls; who in silence, piously in their daily life, understand and practise what is meant by that."[1]

2. St. Paul, mentioning Abel as the first in the catalogue of saints, uses the memorable words that he "being dead yet speaketh," which seem to attach an emphatic teaching to his death. Abel speaks through his righteousness, through his martyrdom. He represents in all countries unto the end of time those to whom the Father, it may be in some hidden manner unknown of man, reveals His Son, and by some secret bond in the mystery of godliness, knits them unto Him. They are not their own; they are of Him, and in Him, and depart to be more intimately with Him. The world knoweth them not as it knew Him not—it knoweth not whence they come nor whither they go. These are strangers upon the earth; the world hateth them because they are of God. Their treasure and their heart are with Him; their treasure, because they give Him the first and best; and their heart, because their affections must needs follow their actions. They devote to Him the first and the best of all; the first and best of their substance, the first and best of their time, the first and best of their affections. They are ready to die for their faith. Thus in every age and nation Abel yet speaketh; each carries on his example, confirms it by others of like character and circumstance, and leaves it yet to speak as it will unto the end.

¶ The best apology for Christianity is a life which makes the supernatural visible to ourselves and others. The more we find by experience that Christianity condemns in us all that is evil and brings forth all that is good, the more our personal faith in its

[1] Bolton King, *Mazzini*, 85.

Divine right and power will grow, even amidst our growing sense of failure and imperfection; and the same conviction must spread to others, as faith is shown by works, and as the rule is brought into fresh application, "By their fruits ye shall know them." . . . The brightness of every Christian example will not only preserve, but indefinitely multiply, the illuminating power of all the evidences of Christianity, as the polished surface of the concave reflector at once mirrors and multiplies the illuminating power of the lighthouse; and thus the heaven-enkindled Pharos will send a broad and kindly beam over the waste of waters in a troubled period, and guide through storm and darkness those who "are afar off upon the sea" to safety and rest.[1]

Tongues of the dead, not lost,
But speaking from death's frost,
Like fiery tongues at Pentecost!

Glimmer, as funeral lamps,
Amid the chills and damps
Of the vast plain where Death encamps![2]

¶ In Abel we have the first-fruits of the City of God; the fulness of the last and crowning beatitude; "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "For not only," says St. Augustine, "from the bodily presence of Christ and His Apostles but from righteous Abel unto the end of time, amidst the persecutions of the world, and the consolations of God, the Church advances onward in her pilgrimage."[3]

So when a great man dies,
For years beyond our ken
The light he leaves behind him lies
Upon the paths of men.[4]

[1] John Cairns, in *Life*, by A. R. MacEwen, 562. [2] Longfellow, *L'Envoi.*
[3] I. Williams, *The Characters of the Old Testament*, 19.
[4] Longfellow, *Charles Sumner.*

ENOCH.

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ENOCH.

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him: for before his translation he hath had witness borne to him that he had been well-pleasing unto God.—Heb. xi. 5.

ENOCH was the bright particular star of the patriarchal epoch. His record is short, but eloquent. It is crowded into a few words, but every word, when placed under examination, expands indefinitely. Every virtue may be read into them; every eulogium possible to a human character shines from them. Enoch reaches the point of renown in godliness: he walked with God; his walk was on the high hills, so high that he simply stepped into the next world without troubling death to go through his long dark process. He sheds a lustre on the antediluvian age, and he shines still as an example to all generations of steady and lofty piety.

¶ I am a simpleton, am I, to quote such an exploded book as Genesis? My good wiseacre readers, I know as many flaws in the book of Genesis as the best of you, but I knew the book before I knew its flaws, while you know the flaws, and never have known the book, nor can know it. And it is at present much the worse for you; for indeed the stories of this book of Genesis have been the nursery tales of men mightiest whom the world has yet seen in art, and policy, and virtue, and none of you will write better stories for your children, yet awhile. And your little Cains will learn quickly enough to ask if they are their brother's keepers, and your little Fathers of Canaan merrily enough to show their own father's nakedness without dread either of banishment or malediction; but many a day will pass, and their evil generations vanish with it, in that sudden nothingness of the wicked, "He passed away, and lo, he was not," before one will again rise, of whose death there may remain the Divine tradition, "He walked with God; and was not, for God took him." Apotheosis! How the dim hope of it haunts even the last degradation of men; through the six thousand years from Enoch.[1]

[1] Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, letter 41 (*Works*, xxviii. 84).

I.

Walking with God.

"Enoch walked with God."

1. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible renders this expression "Enoch pleased God," and this rendering is adopted by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the fifth verse of the eleventh chapter, in which the following account is given of this saintly man: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God"—that he walked with God. Similar language is used to describe the life of Enoch's illustrious descendant Noah (Gen. vi. 9), "Noah was a just man and perfect (upright) in his generations, and Noah walked with God." The language seems to express the character and the conduct of one eminent for his love and devotedness to the service of God.

Let one's conception of the history of this narrative from a literary point of view be what it may, this must have been a man of astonishing life, of marvellous character, that he should have been singled out in this way for such a biography. There is no question that Enoch must have entered into a profounder realization of the Divine, must have lived more in the society of the Eternal, than did his contemporaries. He seems to have been a seer, a man who went out under the midnight sky, and felt the infinite, touched the eternal, was bathed in the presence of God. Men looked at him, felt that there was a glory in him, a soul in him, a consciousness of the Divine in him that they did not possess, and he stood out a giant among his contemporaries.

¶ Of Charles Marriott's many conspicuous graces I am really at a loss which to single out for the foremost place. Sometimes, his profound humility of spirit first presents itself to my memory: at other times, his singleness of purpose: at others, his purity of heart: at others, his utter unselfishness: at others, his candour and forbearance. He was so indulgent in his estimate of other men's words and actions: severe only towards himself. Occasionally, it is the habitual consideration and kindness of his disposition which forces itself on my recollection as his pre-eminent grace. But straightway there spring up, side by side with these, instances

of his rigid conscientiousness; or again, tokens of his boundless charity. He was about the fairest man I ever knew. Perhaps his consistent holiness—the habitually devout and reverent tone of his mind—was his prevailing characteristic. There was something unspeakably sweet, and pure, and simple in the outcome of his habitual inner life. His was indeed a heavenly character. To me he seemed habitually to "walk with God." I first understood the meaning of that Scripture phrase by closely observing him. A brother-fellow expresses my meaning exactly when he remarks that "he seemed to move in a spiritual region out of the reach of us ordinary mortals."[1]

2. Fellowship with God was the secret source of all that was good and great and splendid in the life of Enoch. He lived in a wicked time, in an age that was peculiarly corrupt and evil, and yet in the midst of the wicked men and women who surrounded him his life shone like a star in the night, spotless and clean. There is no doubt that Enoch was a man of like passions with ourselves. He did not go into a wilderness to live a monastic life. He had all the distractions, all the duties, all the complications of family life around him. There is no doubt that Enoch committed sins, and that there were many failures and infirmities in his life; but the whole tenor of his life is summed up in these words, "He walked with God."

The idea suggested by the words is companionship. Two walk together because they are agreed. To produce fellowship of this kind, there must be a unity of purpose and of taste, a correspondence of circumstances, and a harmony of will. The words imply regular, unbroken, well-sustained communion with God. With a sublime and lofty aspiration Enoch had risen above shadows, idols, and pretences, and with simple, manly faith had grasped the unseen substance and reality, the personal God, the Father of us all.

¶ "I had a great desire," she says, "for the most intimate communion with God. For this object, my heart went forth in continual prayer. He answered my supplication richly and deeply. The sensible emotion and joy which I experienced were sometimes overwhelming. My heart was filled with love as well as with joy; with that love which seeks another's will and which is ready to relinquish and sacrifice its own."[2]

[1] J. W. Burgon, *Lives of Twelve Good Men*, i. 337.
[2] T. C. Upham, *Life of Madame Guyon*, 83.

¶ The only way by which we can grow nearer and nearer to our Lord is by steadfastly keeping beside Him. You cannot get the spirit of a landscape unless you sit down and gaze, and let it soak into you. The cheap tripper never sees the lake. You cannot get to know a man until you summer and winter with him. No subject worth studying opens itself out to the hasty glance. Was it not Sir Isaac Newton who used to say, "I have no genius, but I keep a subject before me"?[1]

Thou art the Way.
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,
I cannot say
If Thou hadst ever met my soul.

I cannot see—
I, child of process—if there lies
An end for me,
Full of repose, full of replies.

I'll not reproach
The road that winds, my feet that err.
Access, approach
Art Thou, Time, Way, and Wayfarer.[2]

3. Now it was "by faith," whatever that faith involved, that Enoch "walked with God." This is made quite plain in the verse which follows the eulogy of Enoch in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. "But without faith it is impossible to please God."

We are not to suppose that Enoch possessed all that fulness of faith which is the portion of those who now walk in the light and brightness of the gospel day. But Enoch must have been a thinker, a man of affairs, and a great tribal chieftain. His life, judged by his day, was a strong, active, strenuous, and thoughtful one. Yet such qualities as these were the common possession of all who refused to sink to the lower levels of existence. And there was something which enabled Enoch to rise even above the nobler of his contemporaries, and which singled him out from the crowd. And this something was—just faith. Faith is the one principle which explains all Enoch's eminence, all his nobility of character, all his victories. Enoch was always pleasing to God,

[1] A. Maclaren, *The Unchanging Christ.* [2] Alice Meynell, *Poems* (1913), 84.

but it was because he always believed, and lived in the power of his faith.

¶ It would be well for us if we could learn to trust God as we trust those of our fellow-creatures whom we really believe to be good and loving. We could all name individuals alive or dead, in whose love for us we had such confidence that we should feel satisfied that our eternal interests would be quite safe in their hands, if they had only wisdom and power enough. If we believed that they had the requisite wisdom and power, we should receive every appointment, painful or otherwise, with perfect acquiescence, knowing that it must be for our true good.[1]

II.

Taken by God.

"God took him."

1. The peculiar feature of Enoch's life, that which puts it in a unique class, lies in the fact that he is the first man in the Bible story who thwarted death. He walked with God, and God was pleased with him, "and he was not; for God took him." It is a quaint way of telling how this old saint made the final disappearance. He was not; he was not found, for God had translated him. "I looked," said his friends, one after another, "and, lo, he was not." God had put forth His hand, and taken him to the place of everlasting rest. The life that had been a walk with God had ended at God's feet.

That was the crowning evidence and token of the Divine pleasure. Death is the wages of sin, the harbinger of retribution, the seal of man's humiliation and defeat. The fear of death is a bondage under which the race of man lies, save only where Christian faith and hope alleviate the terror and inspire a superhuman courage before which all fear is banished. The extraordinary nature of Enoch's piety could not be demonstrated by any fact so imperative as this, "He was translated." God took him who had walked with Him—bore him away to another sphere. The very silence of the historian aids the impression: there is no breach between the earthly and the heavenly life, no defined

[1] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, ii. 121.

horizon—clouds, and sky, fields, hills and wood meet together, and this world's beauty and the glory of the world above melt into each other, and one unbroken scene fills and satisfies the eye. He was with God here, he is with God there. He was a "man of God" for three hundred years, "a pilgrim and a stranger" with Him, doing his works in God, speaking the words which God gave him to speak, and God has taken him to be with Him always.

Whether for the sake of others or for his own, the impression made is that the patriarch's pure and godly life was continued; it went right on; it was not broken even by death. God wishes us to perceive that one who lives in fellowship with Himself is already ripe for the close fellowship of heaven. There is no break in the journey. Such a life on this and on that side of the grave is the same. On that side it needs only to be perfected and confirmed. But it is the same life—life with God. God, by this exceptional departure of this exceptional man, has shown us distinctly what ought to be true of all. Enoch stands forth as the proof that a truly Christian life destroys death. And so he walks with God still, a foremost figure no doubt amongst the favoured company who see their Master's face, and have His Name written on their foreheads, the company of those who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

¶ Looked at from beside the Lord of life and death, "great death" dwindles to a very little thing. We need to revise our notions if we would understand how trivial it really is. To us it frowns like a black cliff blocking the upper end of our valley; but there is a path round its base, and though the throat of the pass be narrow, it has room for us to get through, and up to the sunny uplands beyond. From a mountain top the country below seems level plain, and what looked like an impassable precipice has dwindled to be indistinguishable.[1]

¶ Very often through the years we were together he had spoken of death quite calmly, and in this way: "We must remember the great White Angel, but it need not make us sad." I find in my journal this entry: "He looked at me yesterday when we spoke of one who had planned to go to Egypt but who had died. I said, 'He took another journey.' 'Yes, and a much better one,' he answered; 'I want you not to mind when the day comes for me to take that journey—it leads to better things.'"

[1] Alexander Maclaren, *The Wearied Christ*, 105.

"I am glad I painted Death with that white robe," he told me not very long before the last illness, "it makes it an angel, and I often catch a glint of that white garment behind my shoulder, and it seems to me to say 'I am not far off.'" [1]

¶ What is the significance of Death? Death in Christ is an accident in immortality. The great Unity of Life lasts on. Only, like the Sicilian rivers of Grecian poetry, Life's stream had flowed here in rugged channels and under cloudy skies, then it had disappeared for a time into the chambers of darkness, only to reappear in fairer regions and by the sunny sea. The immortal life knows no break in its continuity, only here it is a life sin-stained, sorrow-laden; there sin is gone and sorrow ended, when "in Christ" the living spirit passes the gates of the grave.[2]

> Here life is the beginning of our death,
> And death the starting-point whence life ensues;
> Surely our life is death, our death is life:
> Nor need we lay to heart our peace or strife,
> But calm in faith and patience breathe the breath
> God gave, to take again when He shall choose.[3]

2. Enoch is the universal symbol of Man's immortal hope. In the view of that old world, he is the man who escaped the sight of death. It is a very remarkable circumstance that the full-fledged hope of Christian immortality has reproduced the primitive hope expressed in the translation of Enoch. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," is the utterance in which Christ's latest Gospel reveals the sense of immortality. Is it not the same hope which centred round the personality of Enoch? The idea expressed in the translation of Enoch is not an eccentric idea; it is the predominant thought of the Pentateuch and the latest sentiment of the Christian Evangel. The passion for Eternal Life is the first and the last passion of the Hebrew race. To live for ever, to see no corruption, to keep undimmed life's pristine glow—that is the aspiration which feeds on the sight of Enoch, and that is the aspiration which permeates the morning and the evening of the Jewish day. The thought which kindles that morning and that evening is not the waking from the sleep of death; it is rather the hope that the soul will never

[1] M. S. Watts, *George Frederick Watts*, ii. 316, 322.
[2] W. J. Knox Little, *The Mystery of the Passion*, 88.
[3] Christina G. Rossetti.

sleep; it is the impulse of the spirit of man to see its Promised Land before death, to meet God face to face in some period of the present world, and to have the life preserved by receiving a breath of the Eternal. The ideal of Enoch's immortality is the spirit which pervades Genesis and the thought which inspires St. John. It illuminates the night of Bethel; it dispels the tears of Bethany. It is the Alpha and the Omega; it marks the beginning and the end.

¶ I shall now no more behold my dear Father with these bodily eyes. With him a whole three-score-and-ten years of the Past has doubly died for me; it is as if a new leaf in the great Book of Time were turned over. Strange Time! Endless Time, or of which I see neither end nor beginning! All rushes on; man follows man; his life is as a Tale that has been told. Yet under Time does there not lie Eternity? Perhaps my Father, all that essentially *was* my Father *is* even now near me, with me. Both he and I are with God. Perhaps, if it so please God, we shall in some higher state of being meet one another, recognize one another: as it is written, "we shall be for ever with God!" The possibility, nay (in some way) the certainty of perennial existence daily grows plainer to me. "The essence of whatever was, is, or shall be, even now *is*." God is great; God is good: His will be done, for it will be right![1]

Alas, my God, that we should be
  Such strangers to each other!
O that as friends we might agree,
  And walk and talk together!

May I taste that communion, Lord,
  Thy people have with Thee?
Thy Spirit daily talks with them,
  O let It talk with me!

Like Enoch, let me walk with God,
  And thus walk out my day,
Attended with the heavenly Guards,
  Upon the King's highway.

When wilt Thou come unto me, Lord?
  For till Thou dost appear,
I count each moment for a day,
  Each minute for a year.[2]

[1] Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, i. 51.

[2] Thomas Shepherd.

NOAH.

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NOAH.

By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house ; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.—Heb. xi. 7

1. THE first great event that indelibly impressed itself on the memory of the primeval world was the Flood. There is every reason to believe that this catastrophe was co-extensive with the human population of the world. In every branch of the human family traditions of the event are found. Some of these traditions bear a remarkable likeness to the Biblical story, while others are very beautiful in their construction, and significant in individual points. Local floods happening at various times in different countries could not have given birth to the minute coincidences found in these traditions, such as the sending out of the birds, and the number of persons saved. But we have as yet no material for calculating how far human population had spread from the original centre. It might apparently be argued that it could not have spread to the seacoast, or at any rate no ships had as yet been built large enough to weather a severe storm ; for a thoroughly nautical population could have had little difficulty in surviving such a catastrophe as is here described. But all that can be affirmed is that there is no evidence that the waters extended beyond the inhabited part of the earth ; and from certain details of the narrative, this part of the earth may be identified as the great plain of the Euphrates and Tigris.

2. It is, however, with the moral rather than the physical aspects of the Flood that we now have to do. The narrator ascribes it to the abnormal wickedness of the antediluvians. To describe the demoralized condition of society before the Flood, the

strongest language is used. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great," monstrous in acts of violence, and in habitual courses and established usages. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"—there was no mixture of good, no relentings, no repentances, no visitings of compunction, no hesitations and debatings. It was a world of men fierce and energetic, violent and lawless, in perpetual war and turmoil; in which if a man sought to live a righteous life, he had to conceive it of his own mind and to follow it out unaided and without the countenance of any.

3. How is this abnormal wickedness to be accounted for? In the fourth and fifth chapters of Genesis the development of the human race is traced through two entirely different lines—that of Cain and that of Seth. It would seem that, notwithstanding the sense of the phrase elsewhere in Scripture, the Sethites, and not any beings of a higher world, are in this connexion meant by the august title "sons of God"; and the intermarriage between the Sethites, who had preserved the higher and better traditions of Eden, and the Cainites, who had entirely lost them, issued in the rapid moral degradation of the posterity of Seth. Distinct from this, but contemporaneous with it, was the appearance of the Nephilim, the "giants" of the English Bible. They seem to have been social tyrants rather than physically unnatural monsters; they made the law of might the ruling force of that primitive society. The corruption of the old world was therefore traceable mainly to two factors, each fatal to the moral well-being of man; it was due either to social oppression, or to cruelty, accompanied by a reckless sensuality.

4. Now it is especially to be observed that emphasis is laid on the source of the evil. It proceeds from the heart. The vision of corruption which Noah saw is very graphically and very characteristically described in the sacred narrative, "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually." This is not the description we should have expected. It is characteristic of the Bible, but it is not characteristic of human nature. We should have thought that an ancient narrative wishing to expose the wickedness of a short-lived race would

have begun by making a catalogue of its actual crimes. So would any other ancient narrative in the world. But the Bible is on the very threshold true to its future self. It strikes here a chord from which it never deviates—the chord of inwardness. With surprising modernness, it refuses to indicate corruption by a catalogue of deeds done. It goes to the root of the matter—to the deeds not done, the deeds in the imagination. That is the refrain of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

¶ Paul cries to the Philippians, "Whatsoever things are pure and lovely and of good report, think of these things!" We expect him to say, "Do these things!" But he has simply reproduced the message which was given to primitive humanity, "Beware of your ideal!" There is not a more profound sentiment in all ethical literature. The radical difference between a good man and a bad man lies in what they think. The boundary line between virtue and vice is situated in the imagination.[1]

We are not to be distracted by archæological questions about the Ark or the Flood. Our business is with Noah. The life and character of Noah may be conveniently considered in this way:—

I. A Child of Hope.
II. A Recipient of Grace.
III. A Man of Faith.
IV. A Preacher of Righteousness.
V. An Epoch Maker.
VI. A Sinner.
VII. A Giver of Blessing and of Cursing.

¶ Whether we receive the accounts of the patriarchs as veritable histories, or whether we look upon them as popular legends, framed by we know not whom, and collected together we know not when, is not perhaps a matter of so much consequence to the interests of true religion as is commonly supposed. For although reference is not seldom made to these accounts in later Scriptures, and especially in those Scriptures upon which the fabric of our faith finally reposes—the writings of the Apostles of Jesus—I think we may assert that the reference is generally of such a nature that the question of historic fact is not raised at all. In short, the prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostles of the New use and apply the ancient narratives which they found ready to their hand, not for the purposes of historical

[1] G. Matheson, *Representative Men of the Bible*, i. 94.

study or antiquarian research, but for the inculcation of moral verities. When St. Paul states that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, he means by this that they were written to further moral and spiritual as distinct from merely intellectual culture. By his own example, in the Epistle to the Galatians for instance, and in the Romans, which are perhaps his most characteristic writings, he indicates what he regarded as the legitimate mode of applying the ancient Scriptures to modern necessities. Everywhere he finds allegory, figures, types, foreshadowing things to come; and that, not so much because he was destitute of historical perception, as because he devoutly believed that the chief if not the entire value of the Hebrew records lay precisely in this illustrative use of them. To him they were the great lesson-books of humanity, out of which, under the interpretative guidance of the Spirit, instruction and warning and comfort were to be elicited for all succeeding ages.[1]

I.

A Child of Hope.

And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son: and he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us for our work and for the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.—Gen. v. 28, 29.

1. Lamech felt the evils of his time; all seemed to him to flow, as it did flow, from the sin which had been perpetrated, and from the curse which had been pronounced, in Eden. He felt the burden of his labour upon the soil, and when his son was born, we read a proof of the father's melancholy, together with the prophetic presentiment of a brighter future, in the name of the infant: "And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us for our work and for the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."

"Noah" means rest or comfort; and his parents gave him this name, expecting through him, in some way, or probably in more ways than one, the fulfilment to them of the happy meaning of the name he bore. We cannot say, in the absence of any information in the Book, how definite their expectation was regarding their son. Perhaps they themselves hardly knew

[1] C. J. Ball.

exactly what they were expecting. They were sure, however, and not by parental instinct merely, but evidently as the result of some Divine intimation given them concerning this child, that he would be a comforting helper. He would help them in their labours on the stubborn soil; he would help them in their resistance to the rapidly increasing violence of society around them; it is possible that they may have had some hope that he might even prove to be the Messiah.

2. But besides this general sense of failure in the world and this hope that Noah was sent to redeem the disappointment, is it not possible that Lamech had also a personal sense of failure and that his hopes went forward to his son as sent to redeem his life from its barrenness and its worthlessness? Lamech may have been a successful man as this world counts success. But when men succeed in what the world and their ambitions urge them to attempt, there almost always comes a certain sense of tawdriness and worthlessness in the result; and this sense is often keenest in the noblest men, keen and deep just in proportion to men's native nobleness and also in proportion to the nobleness of the work in which they have succeeded. The wise man finds it when he has won his learning, the conscientious man when he has done his duty, the patient man when he has borne his pain. In weak, exhausted moments after the victory comes the question whether it is all worth while. It seems as if the mere fact of learning or doing or suffering were like an athlete's triumph, fruitless of real result, and good for nothing but a show. Many and many a busy or patient man's and woman's life is haunted by this sense of tawdriness, this lack of worth and dignity.

Where is the rescue to come from? A man must learn that behind all effort and in spite of all disappointment there is a purpose in his life. That is the first element of hope, and it has wonderful virtue when seen steadily. But he may have to learn, further, that this purpose is being fulfilled, not in his own life but in the lives that are to come after him and that link themselves to his. The son "shall comfort us," not simply in our own lifetime, but by the vision of faith, that, when we pass, God's work goes on. If it has entered, through folly and sin, upon a wrong track, that path may have to be closed and a new way

opened. But the work will go on and God's great purpose be fulfilled.

If God may present Himself to us over the ruins of our fallen work as He never could have entered in by its stately and well-built gates, and so the purpose of our life may be attained in all the failure of its form;—then, surely, there is consolation—the consolation upon which the bravest and the most successful of us have to fall back a thousand times—the promise of repair which, though it never can make the breakage of a life seem trivial, may prevent it from seeming fatal; and may make, thank God! a new courage where the old has died, a courage full of faith when the courage of self-reliance has become impossible for ever.

Courage! for life is hasting
To endless life away:
The inner life unwasting
Transfigures thy dull clay.

Lost, lost, are all our losses;
Love sets for ever free:
The full life heaves and tosses
Like an eternal sea:

One endless, living story,
One poem spread abroad!
And the sum of all our glory
Is the countenance of God![1]

II.

A Recipient of Grace.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations: Noah walked with God.—Gen. vi. 8, 9.

1. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." This was the foundation of his life as it is the foundation of every true life to-day. "By grace are ye saved." Grace, in the Bible sense of the word, means God's unmerited favour, and it was this alone that gave Noah his spiritual position before God. He was "saved by grace alone."

[1] Phillips Brooks, *The More Abundant Life*, 159.

¶ I often asked myself why God had preferences, why all souls did not receive an equal measure of grace. I was filled with wonder when I saw extraordinary favours showered on great sinners like St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Mary Magdalen, and many others, whom He forced, so to speak, to receive His grace. In reading the lives of the Saints I was surprised to see that there were certain privileged souls, whom Our Lord favoured from the cradle to the grave, allowing no obstacle in their path which might keep them from mounting towards Him. Our Lord has deigned to explain this mystery to me. He showed me the book of nature, and I understood that every flower created by Him is beautiful, that the brilliance of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not lessen the perfume of the violet or the sweet simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all the lowly flowers wished to be roses, nature would lose its springtide beauty, and the fields would no longer be enamelled with lovely hues. And so it is in the world of souls, Our Lord's living garden. He has been pleased to create great Saints who may be compared to the lily and the rose, but He has also created lesser ones, who must be content to be daisies or simple violets flowering at His Feet, and whose mission it is to gladden His Divine Eyes when He deigns to look down on them. And the more gladly they do His Will the greater is their perfection. I understood this also, that God's Love is made manifest as well in a simple soul which does not resist His grace as in one more highly endowed.[1]

2. "Noah was a righteous man." From grace comes righteousness, and whether we think of its Old Testament meaning of genuineness and sincerity, or of its New Testament fuller meaning of being right with God, we can see its necessity and importance for every one of us. As applied to Noah, it means that he was an earnest, thoughtful, religious, spiritual man. Amidst abounding ungodliness he cleaved to Jehovah, serving Him with his whole heart, holding constant communion with Him; and he lived in the realization of the presence of an unseen Father and Friend, whose precepts he implicitly obeyed, and to whom he carried habitually the tale of his trials and sorrows. In his personal life he was pure. His household, with the one wife at the head of it, with its order and decency and regularity of behaviour, offered a marked contrast to the licentious manners of the age and to the coarse indulgence of the lowest passions

[1] *Sœur Thérèse of Lisieux*, 16.

of human nature by which he was everywhere surrounded. His habits were simple. He was noticeable for self-control and self-restraint. And when it came to dealings with his neighbours, although he was, as it would appear, the chief of a powerful clan, we never find him taking advantage of his position to grasp at another's possessions, or in any way to use his strength and influence for unrighteous ends. He was fair and just in every transaction, honourable, upright, truthful, conscientious, trustworthy. And this is all the more remarkable when we remember that for a considerable part of his career he must have stood in these respects almost entirely alone.

¶ What men call simple goodness is, under very complex conditions of work, not so simple or obvious a matter as it sounds. Behind the simplicity of the result there are qualities, both moral and intellectual, which are among the greatest attainments of a human nature. They may be attained through moral discipline; but none the less may they outstrip in a common field of exercise the mental gifts which men rate highest. The unembarrassed insight which goes straight to the real character of an action or suggestion; the just imagination which can enter into another's position, and transpose without altering the parts of a transaction where one's self is interested; the kindly shrewdness which is never credulous and never cynical; the strength of mind that can resist the temptation to be clever; and, above all, that sense of things unseen which makes palpable the folly of ever fancying that there can be through evil a short cut to good;—these are some of the faculties which are required and exerted and developed in that simple goodness which is enlightened and sustained by trust in God; that consistent and unwearied doing good, that purity both of purpose and of method, which is the distinction of the souls that humbly and sincerely rest on Him.[1]

3. Noah's personal piety is described by the same phrase as Enoch's: he "walked with God." This expression denotes even more than that which is used in a Divine command to Abraham, and in Abraham's description of his own life. Abraham was to "walk," and did "walk before God." Still more carefully should it be distinguished from "walking after God," a phrase by which Moses enjoins obedience to the Law in one age, and Josiah renews it in another. To walk after God is to lead a life of obedience to

[1] *Francis Paget, Bishop of Oxford*, 183.

the commands given in the Divine law; to walk before Him is to be constantly conscious of His overshadowing and searching Presence. But to walk with God is something higher and more blessed even than this; it is to be, as it were, constantly at His side, and in His confidence; it is to be admitted to close and intimate communion with Him as with a most cherished Friend; it is to be in spirit what the Apostles were in the flesh, when they shared, day by day, in the streets and lanes of Galilee, the Divine companionship of the Incarnate Son. Under the Gospel, it is St. John's "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ"; it is the equivalent to St. Paul's "being quickened and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Only once besides does the phrase occur in the Old Testament, when the prophet Malachi applies it, not to the conduct of the Israelites generally, but to that of the priests, who stood in a closer relation to God than the rest of the people, and could enter the Holy of Holies, and hold intercourse with the Presence which was veiled from the public eye.

(1) The expression implies *companionship* — constant and habitual; for as God is everywhere present and at all times, so the saint is never parted from Him. United once, we are united for ever, by a companionship as constant as the omnipresence of God, and as long continued as the immortal life of man's soul. It is not the mere fact of God's guardian presence that is stated, it is Noah's consciousness of that presence. His vivid faith realized God, as if the soul's inward eye saw the invisible, till His presence became as real as when the eye sees, and when the hand touches, some human companion of our walk.

(2) The expression also implies *concurrence of will.* To walk together implies movement toward the same object, along the same road. Where two persons take different roads, companionship must cease. "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" There must be the same will in companions. Man's will must be changed to suit God's, and thus all the varying wishes of mankind be harmonized in one adoring submission to the Divine mind.

(3) The expression implies *affectionate and delightful intercourse.* Do you not choose as a companion one whom you love? and if your choice is well placed, and there is thorough sympathy

between you and your friend, is not companionship delightful? Indeed, do you not walk with him for the sake of being alone with the loved one and enjoying his society? God is infinite and omnipresent, and can walk at the same time with all the countless company of the redeemed saints, and yet be with each one as really, as completely, in every glorious attribute, as if He and that one individual were alone together. And what must be the unutterable delights of such companionship, when perfect love casteth out fear!

¶ Madame Guyon speaks of the early part of her residence at Gex as characterized by sweet and happy peace of mind and most intimate communion with God. Many times she awoke at midnight with such a presence of God in her soul that she could no longer sleep, but arose and spent hours in prayer and praise and Divine communion. On one occasion her exercises were connected with the Scripture, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God"; which was brought to her mind very forcibly, and so applied to her own situation and feelings as to cause the most devout and pleasing reflections. "It was accompanied," she says, "with the most pure, penetrating, and powerful communication of grace that I had ever experienced. And here I may remark, that, although my soul was truly renovated, as to know nothing but God alone, yet it was not in that strength and immutability in which it has since been."[1]

¶ "How little," says Bushnell, "do we know as yet of what is contained in the word of God! We put on great magnifiers in the form of adjectives, and they are true; but the measures they ascribe, certified by the judgment, are not realized, or only dimly realized, in our experience. I see this proved to me, now and then, by the capacity I have to think and feel greater things concerning God. It is as if my soul were shut in within a vast orb made up of concentric shells of brass or iron. I could hear, even when I was a child, the faint ring of a stroke on the one that is outmost and largest of them all; but I began to break through one shell after another, bursting every time into a kind of new, and wondrous, and vastly enlarged heaven, hearing no more the dull, close ring of the nearest casement, but the ring, as it were, of concave firmaments and third heavens set with stars; till now, so gloriously has my experience of God opened His greatness to me, I seem to have gotten quite beyond all physical images and measures, even those of astronomy, and simply to think God is to find and bring into my feeling more than even the

[1] T. C. Upham, *Life of Madame Guyon*, 153.

imagination can reach. I bless God that it is so. I am cheered by it, encouraged, sent onward, and, in what He gives me, begin to have some very faint impression of the glory yet to be revealed."[1]

III.

A Man of Faith.

By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.—Heb. xi. 7.

1. In the narrative in Genesis the righteousness of Noah is attributed to the grace of God. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is also concerned with Noah's righteousness, but he looks at it from the human side. It is the consequence of Noah's faith. As a man of faith, who has his place in the great roll of the faithful ones of the earth—in that aspect is the patriarch regarded in this Epistle. It is therefore as a man of faith that we are most accustomed to think of him and to profit by the lesson of his life.

2. In what respects was Noah conspicuous for his faith?

(1) *He had an earnest conviction of the sanctity and greatness of moral truth*, a conviction which, beyond any other, is the basis of the religious character. He was surrounded by populations which had broken altogether with the laws of God; impiety, impurity, lawlessness were the order of the day. "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually"; the corruption was universal, internal, profound. To a great many men a surrounding atmosphere of moral evil would be destructive of the moral sight.

It was against this silent and fatal influence of a corrupt moral and social atmosphere that Noah's life was a protest and a resistance. Scripture says he was "perfect in (or among) his generations," and those generations were altogether corrupt. He was a preacher of righteousness when righteousness was at a discount and unpopular. He walked with God when mankind at large had forgotten Him. He did not think the better of sin, of its real nature or of its future prospects, only because it was practised on

[1] T. T. Munger, *Horace Bushnell*, 177.

a large scale, and with considerable apparent impunity. To Noah the eternal truths were more certain than the surface-appearances of life; he was certain that evil was evil, and that it could not but be followed by chastisement, because God is God.

¶ Intense in his theological convictions, based, as he held them to be, on the Infallible Word, my father was also intense in his spirituality of mind. With him, spiritual interests were primary, spiritual considerations predominant, spiritual standards supreme. No man was ever less influenced by worldly motives and worldly ambitions. They were mere ciphers in his arithmetic of life. I do not believe he ever allowed himself to be moved by the thought of monetary gain or loss in anything he said or did; he was ruled by principle, not by pocket. Nor do I believe that he was ever affected by the subtler appeal of popularity; he coveted the approval of God, not the applause of men. If, for the sake of truth and righteousness, he gave offence and made enemies, it was with real regret and sorrow. He was no fire-eater. But in so sacred a cause, sooner than trim and compromise, and admit that though, indeed, black is not white, it may still possibly be grey, the offence must be given, and the enemies made. The one question was, Was he doing what he believed his Lord would have him do? If the answer of his conscience and his heart was Yes, then, irrespective of all worldly considerations, he must unfalteringly go on.[1]

(2) *He believed God when the warning came of an approaching calamity.*—He was warned of "things not seen as yet." These things were almost to him as if he did see them, just because God had somehow whispered into his heart beforehand that they were actually coming. Unless we think of Noah as a man with our own faculties and feelings, it will be impossible for us—and even then it will be difficult for us—to get close up to him and realize that gigantic catastrophe which he was anticipating, but which had not as yet, in the least item of it, come to pass. It is hard for us so to rid our mind of a great event, after we have become familiar with it, as to take our stand by the side of those to whom it was a thing not yet happened, and to see with their eyes, or to believe with their faith, or to feel as if we knew no more than they knew. "Things not seen as yet"—it is an immensely different matter from things which now are seen as commonplace sights. Yet Noah's whole conduct, in his heart and

[1] H. Varley, *Henry Varley's Life-Story* (1913), 245.

in his life, was controlled for a hundred years by "things not seen" by him, even in the faintest measure, "as yet."

¶ How few of us realize that faith is the truest foresight. It is very likely that the least wicked people in Noah's time, if asked what they thought of him, would have said, "A good sort of man, but weak-minded." No one gave him credit for being long-headed; but it is not the simple who "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself." The deluge was contrary to the world's experience. There never had been a flood. Had there ever been in that part of the world a single shower? We know that the flowers of Eden were never spoiled by rain (Gen. ii. 6), and it is more than likely that to Noah the idea of a flood was as a great surprise; but it was enough for him that God said it.[1]

(3) *He was moved with godly fear.*—By "fear" here we are not merely to understand—though possibly it is not to be excluded—a dread of personal consequences, but much rather the sweet and lofty emotion which is described in another part of this same book by the same word: "Let us serve him with reverence and with godly fear." It is the fear of pious regard, of religious awe, of reverence which has love blended inseparably with it, and is not merely a tremulous apprehension of some mischief coming to us. Noah had no need for that self-regarding "fear," inasmuch as one-half of his knowledge of the future was the knowledge of his own absolute safety. But reverence, the dread of going against his Father's will, lowly submission, and all analogous and kindred sentiments, are expressed by the word.

Especially did his fear make him obedient. He learnt exactly as God taught. "According to all that God commanded him, so did he." It was the "allness" that ensured the ark. We are so ready to adopt parts of God's plan, and fit them in with parts of our own plan: and so we often forfeit all. Length and height, window and door—he took God's specifications as they were, and built his ark to the plan—"moved with fear."

¶ In the earlier period of Dr. Duncan's course, his view of the Divine glory was often the same as Isaiah's, "Woe is me, because I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts"; and as Job's, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself." Latterly this holy fear was modified, but it continued

[1] T. Champness.

to the end; and the enviable epitaph found on some of our old gravestones might most fittingly have been written on his, "Deceased in the fear of God."[1]

(4) *He persevered under difficulties.*—His faith was a practical principle, and it upheld him in the face of serious discouragements. He had to begin his work, and to continue it, not merely without active support and sympathy, but under the eye of a public opinion, not so much hostile as contemptuously cynical. What was this extraordinary outlay of labour and skill? What was its purpose and meaning? How was it other than the crotchet of a visionary and a fanatic?

¶ If I were asked to photograph the life of Noah in one expression, I would say that its characteristic is solitary waiting. From beginning to end this is its leading feature. As with the life of Enoch, there are three risings and fallings of the curtain. We first see the man in the midst of the world, lifting a solitary protest against the life of that world. It is the lonely vigil of a single human soul through the watches of a night lit up by the lamps of revelry and heated by the fires of licence; it is Faith watching and waiting for the dawn. Then the scene changes. The man is lifted above the world—almost translated like Enoch. He is floated in the air on a lonely sea—a sea whose waters have covered every rood of land and have buried in their depths that giant strength of which earth was so proud. But even in this vast solitude this human soul is waiting—waiting for an earth renewed, waiting for the green leaf to reappear, waiting for the emergence of the mountain's brow. He is sending forth the raven and the dove as his messengers to bring him tidings of the reappearing land. Then comes the third vision, and it is different from both. The night is gone and the waters are gone. The world has risen baptized from its corruption, but with the weariness of a weaned child. The old life is past, but the new is not yet come. And there stands Noah—solitary, waiting still! For the first time in his vigil he waits under a rainbow. The new life has not come, but hope has dawned. Light is in the east; morning is in the air; the breath of spring is pulsating in the ground. Everywhere there is the joy of a fresh start in life. Everywhere there is the proclamation of a second chance for Man—a chance of emancipation from the old heredity, of liberation from the yoke of yesterday, of freedom from the ancestral stain. When the last curtain falls it leaves Noah waiting; but he is waiting under the rainbow.[2]

[1] A. Moody Stuart, *Recollections of the late John Duncan*, 40. [2] G. Matheson.

IV.

A Preacher of Righteousness.

Noah . . . a preacher of righteousness.—2 Pet. ii. 5.

Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.—Ezek. xiv. 14.

1. The attitude of Noah was that of a reformer. He was not content to look after himself. He would fain save the people from the penalty of wrong-doing. And so he became a preacher of righteousness in their midst. There is a moral grandeur in Noah's character, and a pathetic interest in his mission, which entitle him to our highest esteem. We imagine Enoch as living apart from the crowd—repelled by their mode of life, and pleased to make his escape. We think of him as spending his life in the presence of God upon the plane of undisturbed communion. And he who lived away from earth so much, even whilst a sojourner, at last left it altogether, and was glad enough to get away. But Noah was not thus favoured. He was neither circumstanced nor constituted thus, and scarcely desired to be. He must have experienced great agony of soul as he beheld a scene of wild disorder and confusion. His heart must have been heavy with the burden of a people's sin. He deplored their folly, and foresaw their doom. Could he cure the one, or prevent the other? Would they learn the lesson of the Ark, and avert the disaster of a flood? He knew not, but he would do his best. And if his daily protest failed to convince, he would still continue under the eye of God, and in hope of a brighter dawn.

2. The state of the world was bad exceedingly, yet Noah did not despair and remain silent. At a certain stage of despair to drop the curtain and be done with the world is a very easy thing; but at no stage is it the highest thing. The highest thing is to refuse to accept the position of the world as final, to insist on remaining within it until its sin is washed away. That is the attitude of Noah. He is the sad spectator of a scene of moral corruption. His heart is heavy with the burden of a degenerate

race. Yet he refuses to abandon the rôle of a declaimer. He clings to the hope that, when the ship is shattered by the storm, there may be left entire a single plank which shall be the foundation of a new vessel, destined for wider and nobler service.

¶ "He shall comfort us concerning the work of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." Such was the hope which centred round his life. I understand the words to mean, "His piety shall profit us, his prayers shall bring good harvests." Yet this is the man who becomes a thorn in the side of that old world! There he stands—a solitary figure over against a multitude! He plants himself suddenly in the highway and raises into shrill accents that voice which hitherto had been silent. The note of his preaching is Reform. He calls to his countrymen: "You are in a delusion. You think you are building on the solid earth. I tell you that you are separated by a thin crust from a flood of waters. You and I are in the path of an overwhelming tide, and I do not mean to stay there; I must have something to breast the coming waves. Will you not avert their coming? Will you not realize before it is too late that if you crush out mind by matter you have broken the only embankment that restrains the sea? Will you let in a rush of waters that will drown society, engulf order, submerge law, swamp the paths of peace, overwhelm the meek and gentle, bury fathoms deep the aspirations of the heart?"[1]

3. Why was it that Noah was so signally unsuccessful as a preacher? Was it because it was righteousness that he preached? That may very well have been the reason; for righteousness is the one thing that our hearers will not have at our hands. All other kinds of preaching — polemical preaching, apologetical preaching, historical and biographical preaching, sacramental preaching, evangelical preaching — some of our people will welcome, and will indeed demand; but they will all agree in refusing and resenting the preaching of righteousness; the preaching of repentance and reformation; the preaching of conversation and conduct and character.

¶ My one and sole remaining ambition in life is to preach righteousness. To preach righteousness,—the nature of it, the means to attain it, the terrible difficulty of attaining it, and the splendid reward it will be to him who at last attains it. To preach righteousness, and all matters connected with righteous-

[1] G. Matheson.

ness, first to myself, then to my sons, and then to my people. This one thing I do.[1]

¶ On the whole, poor Irving's style of preaching was sufficiently surprising to his hide-bound Presbyterian public; and this was but a slight circumstance to the novelty of the matter he set forth upon them. Actual practice: "If this thing is true, why not do it? You had better do it; there will be nothing but misery and ruin in not doing it!"—that was the gist and continual purport of all his discoursing;—to the astonishment and deep offence of hide-bound mankind.[2]

4. The event in which Noah believed before it came was appealed to in a later age by St. Peter, as furnishing a reason for believing in a still future and greater catastrophe. St. Peter is writing at the very close of his life, and already a sufficient time had elapsed since the Ascension of our Lord to allow for the formation of doubts respecting His Second Coming, doubts which were based upon the laws of life. "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." The Apostle reminds those who argued thus that time has no meaning for the Eternal God, and that to apply our notions of the difference between greater and less portions of it to His Majestic Providences is to forget that there is simply no such thing as succession in His unbegun, unending Life. "Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." But if Christ's delay meant nothing but His long-suffering, the unchanging order of the world could not be urged as a reason for disbelief in the catastrophe of a future judgment, because the past history of the world already contained at least one eminent example of such a catastrophe. "By the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." In other words, water had been the instrument by which the surface of the earth was moulded, and one of the constituent elements of its well-being and productiveness; yet at the creative word of God, from being a servant and a blessing, it became an overmastering force and scourge. What had been, might yet be; another element had yet

[1] A. Whyte. [2] Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ii. 42.

a work to do in God's providence, and neither the lapse of years nor the regularity of the observed order of nature was any real reason for presuming that the final catastrophe would not come at last. "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men."

¶ Nature keeps silently a most exact Savings-bank, and official register, correct to the most evanescent item. Debtor and Creditor, in respect to one and all of us; silently marks down, Creditor by such and such an unseen act of veracity and heroism: Debtor to such a loud blustery blunder, twenty-seven million strong or one unit strong, and to all acts and words and thoughts executed in consequence of that,—Debtor, Debtor, Debtor, day after day, rigorously as Fate (for this is Fate that is writing); and at the end of the account you will have it all to pay, my friend; there is the rub! This used to be a well-known fact; and daily still, in certain edifices, steeple-houses, joss-houses, temples sacred or other, everywhere spread over the world, we hear some dim mumblement of an assertion that such is still, what it was always and will for ever be, the fact; but meseems it has terribly fallen out of memory nevertheless; and, from Dan to Beersheba, one in vain looks out for a man that really in his heart believes it. In his heart he believes, as we perceive, that scrip will yield dividends: but that Heaven too has an office of account, and unerringly marks down, against us or for us, whatsoever thing we do or say or think, and treasures up the same in regard to every creature—this I do not so well perceive that he believes. Poor blockhead, no: he reckons that all payment is in money, or approximately representable by money; finds money go a strange course; disbelieves the Parson and his Day of Judgment; discerns not that there is any judgment except in the small or big debt court; and lives (for the present) on that strange footing in this Universe. The unhappy mortal, what is the use of his "civilizations" and his "useful knowledges," if he have forgotten that beginning of human knowledge; the earliest perception of the awakened human soul in this world; the first dictate of Heaven's inspiration to all men? I cannot account him a man any more; but only a kind of human beaver, who has acquired the art of ciphering.[1]

5. Noah was a preacher not only by words but by deeds. In consequence of the corruption of mankind he was commissioned to

[1] Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

prepare an ark for the saving of himself and his family from the waters of the deluge. Thus not only Noah himself but every tree that fell in the forest, and every plank that was laid in the ark; every axe-stroke and the echo of every hammer was a louder and ever louder call to the men of that corrupt and violent day to flee from the wrath to come. But, sad to say, the very men without whose help the ark would never have been built; the very men who felled the trees, and planed and laid the planks, and careened and caulked the seams of the finished ship—those very men failed to take a passage in that ship for themselves, for their wives and for their children.

¶ Many a skilled and high-paid carpenter, many a strong-limbed and grimy-faced blacksmith, and many a finisher and decorator in woodwork and in iron, must have gnashed their teeth and cursed one another when they saw their children drowning all around them, and the ark shut, and borne up, and lifted up above the earth. But those carpenters and blacksmiths and finishers were wise men and their loss was salvation compared with many of those architects and builders and ornamenters of churches who compete with one another and undersell one another in our day. As also compared with all those publishers and printers and booksellers of Bibles, and all those precentors and choirs and organists, and all those elders and deacons and door-keepers, who are absolutely indispensable to the Kingdom of God, but who are all the time themselves outside of it. The Gibeonites in Israel were hewers of wood and drawers of water to Israel; they dwelt in Israel, and had their victuals there, but they were all the time aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. And all Noah's own excellent sermons, all his pulpit appeals about righteousness, and all his crowds of congregations would not have kept his grey head above the rising waters that he had so often described in his sermons, had he not himself gone and done what the Lord commanded him to do. That is to say, had he not, not only prepared the ark, but had he not gone up into the ark, and asked the Lord to shut him in. We ministers may preach the very best of gospels to you, and yet at the end of our ministry be castaways ourselves. "What if I," wrote Rutherford to Lady Kenmure—"What if I, who can have a subscribed testimonial of many who shall stand at the right hand of the Judge, shall myself miss Christ's approval, and be set upon the left hand? There is such a beguile, and it befalleth many. What if it befall me, who have but too much art to cover my own soul and others with the

flourish of ministerial, country holiness!" The next Sabbath after that on which Noah preached his last sermon on righteousness, sea monsters were already whelping and stabling in his pulpit.[1]

V.

An Epoch Maker.

And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.—Gen. viii. 20.

And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.—Gen. ix. 8, 9.

The Flood was over. On the first day of the first month, New Year's day, Noah removed the covering of the ark, which seems to have stranded on the Armenian tableland, and looked out upon the new world. He cannot but have felt his responsibility, as a kind of second Adam. And many questionings must have arisen in his mind regarding the relation of the new to the old. Was there to be any connexion with the old world at all, or was all to begin afresh? Were the promises, the traditions, the events, the genealogies of the old world of any significance now? The Flood distinctly marked the going out of one order of things and the establishment of another. Man's career and development, or what we call history, had not before the Flood attained its goal. If this development was not to be broken short off, and if God's purpose in creation was to be fulfilled, then the world must still go on. Some worlds may perhaps die young, as individuals die young. Others endure through hairbreadth escapes and constant dangers, find their way like our planet through showers of fire, and pass without collision the orbits of huge bodies, carrying with them always, as our world does, the materials of their destruction within themselves. Catastrophes, however, do not cut short but evolve God's purposes. The Flood came that God's purpose might be fulfilled. The course of nature was interrupted, the arrangements of social and domestic life were overturned, all the works of men were swept away that this

[1] A. Whyte.

purpose might be fulfilled. It was expedient that one generation should die for all generations; and this generation having been taken out of the way, fresh provision is made for the co-operation of man with God. On man's part there is an emphatic acknowledgment of God by sacrifice; on God's part there is a renewed grant to man of the world and its fulness, a renewed assurance of His favour.

¶ The fourth picture by Watts of the Flood represents the forty-first day of the great cataclysm. The waters are abating, though the mighty Deluge still asserts its destructive force. But there is hope and promise. The Ark is barely visible on the heights of Ararat, surrounded by clouds which become more luminous as they mount to the zenith. The whole sky is taken possession of by the Bow in the clouds, formed by the power of light and heat, dissipating the darkness and dissolving the multitude of waters into vapour, and consisting of a succession of circular rainbows, one beyond the other, with rays of light passing through and uniting them, lighting up all the dark remains of the storm. Attention is thus directed to the one thing only, the sign of the great world-covenant, that seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat, day and night should never cease, opening its blossom of light out of the very bosom of the gloomy tempest. It is a very striking representation; but it may be questioned if it represents fairly what Noah actually saw. Is it not more likely that the first rainbow was what every rainbow we have seen ever since has been, half a circle, with its feet resting at opposite points of the earth? It is only half a rainbow that we can see in a world so full of trouble and storm as this is, emblematical of the partial and temporary cure of the world's sorrow. Only in heaven can we see, when this fleeting dispensation is ended, and all things are finished and perfected, a rainbow *round about* the Throne in sight like unto an emerald, emblem of the completeness of the peace of heaven.[1]

1. The second age of the world begins with the new shape taken by revelation, in presenting itself as God's covenant with man, and, in the first instance, as a world-covenant, in which God gives to creation a pledge of its preservation; for the order of salvation is to rise on the ground of the order of nature. God's faithfulness in this is security for His faithfulness in that. The sacrifice precedes the institution of the covenant, and has its

[1] H. Macmillan, *Life-Work of George Frederick Watts*, 153.

motive mainly in thanks for the deliverance experienced, while in it, at the same time, man approaches God, seeking grace in the future.

¶ A beautiful sight was the altar which Noah built upon the re-appearing earth. Beautiful to think that there was a church before there was a house! If you look at that first building in the new world you will see it expand until it becomes a sanctuary wide as the earth, and all men are gathered in loving piety within its ample walls. Sweet was the savour that rose from earth to heaven! And as the smoke curled upward to the approving sky the primeval blessing was repronounced; the seasons were confirmed in their revolutions; and all things seemed to begin again in unclouded hope.[1]

2. The covenant with Noah was on the plane of nature. It is man's natural life in the world that is the subject of it. The sacredness of life is its great lesson. Men might well wonder whether God did not hold life cheap. In the old world violence had prevailed. But while Lamech's sword may have slain its thousands, God had in the Flood slain tens of thousands. The covenant, therefore, directs that human life must be reverenced. The primal blessing is renewed; men are to multiply and replenish the earth; the slaughter of a man was to be reckoned a capital crime; and the maintenance of life was guaranteed by a special clause, securing the regularity of the seasons. If, then, you ask, Was this just a beginning again where Adam began? Did God just wipe out man as a boy wipes his slate clean, when he finds his calculation is turning out wrong? Had all these generations learned nothing; had the world not grown at all since its birth?—The answer is, it had grown, and in two most important respects—it had come to the knowledge of the uniformity of nature, and the necessity of human law. This great departure from the uniformity of nature brought into strong relief its normal uniformity, and gave men their first lesson in the recognition of a God who governs by fixed laws. And they learned also from the Flood that wickedness must not be allowed to grow unchecked and attain dimensions which nothing short of a flood can cope with.

It is often said that God never gives a command without

[1] J. Parker.

providing the grace needed to obey, and we have a striking illustration of this great principle in the passage before us. Following naturally and appropriately after the Divine counsels given in the preceding section we have the assurance of needed grace in connection with the Divine covenant.

(1) The *Source* of the covenant naturally comes first (ver. 9). Its author was God. Human covenants were entered into mutually between two parties, but here the entire initiation was taken by God. "I, behold, I" (ver. 9); "I will" (ver. 11); "I make" (ver. 12); "I have established" (ver. 17). The significance of this is due to the fact that it was of God's free grace alone that the covenant was made. His blessings were to be bestowed even though nothing had been done by man to deserve them. Everything is of grace from first to last.

(2) The *Scope* of the covenant is also noteworthy (vers. 9, 10). It comprehended Noah and his seed, and not only these, but "every living creature." Thus the blessings of God were to be extended as widely over the earth as they could possibly be. This is not the only place in Scripture where the destiny of the lower creation is intimately connected with that of man (Isa. xi. 6–8; Rom. viii. 19–22).

(3) The *Purpose* of the covenant should be carefully noted (ver. 11). It was associated with the assurance that human life should not be cut off or the world destroyed any more by a flood. The appropriateness of this revelation is apparent, for at that time it must have been a real perplexity to know whether there would be any repetition in the future of what had been experienced in the Flood. Everything connected with man's relations to God had been altered by that catastrophe, and now God does not leave him ignorant, but, on the contrary, pledges Himself not to bring another similar judgment upon the earth.

(4) The *Sign* of the covenant is specially emphasized (vers. 12, 13). The rainbow is now given a specific spiritual meaning, and Nature for the first time becomes a symbol of spiritual truth. We know from subsequent passages what a great principle is brought before us in this way. It is what is known as the "sacramental principle." In one of the Homilies of the Church of England, Sacraments are defined as "visible signs to which are annexed promises," and the rainbow was the first of such visible

signs illustrative of spiritual truths. We think of the Passover Lamb, the Brazen Serpent, Gideon's Fleece, and especially of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as illustrations of this Divine method of revealing and assuring us of spiritual truth. As Lange beautifully says, "God's eye of grace and our eye of faith meet in the Sacraments." Our faith lays hold of the promise annexed to the sign, and the sign strengthens and confirms our faith that God will fulfil His word. At the same time it must never be forgotten that if there is no faith in the promise there can be no assurance in the sign. The word and the sign necessarily go together, and can never be separated. This revelation of the spiritual meaning of the rainbow was God's response to Noah's altar. Divine faithfulness thus answered to human faith, and it is of real interest that in the symbol of the prophet Ezekiel (ch. i. 28), and of the Apocalypse (Rev. iv. 3, x. 1), the rainbow is again brought before us.[1]

A myth, you say, that once a deluge fell
  Upon the earth in days of long ago,
  Till higher than the highest mountain snow
At length there rose the waters' ruthless swell?
And that in His good time God thought it well
  To stay the flood, and for a sign to throw
  Across the heavens a many-coloured bow?
A myth, you say? Ah, well, I cannot tell!

This only do I know, that God unsealed
  A flood of sorrow in my soul and hid
  Awhile of hope my loftiest pyramid;
  Till, while I wept, He sent the sun again,
Made of my tears a rainbow, and revealed
  Therein the boundless promise born of pain.[2]

3. God honoured the altar by the promise which He gave beside it: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." The light of Noah's altar falls on our harvest-fields to-day, recalling the harvesters of earth to the word and the goodness of a "faithful Creator." If "the lord of seamen" teaches all who sail the waters to put their ark in God's charge, the lord of

[1] W. H. G. Thomas. [2] Gilbert Thomas, *The Wayside Altar* (1913), 20.

harvesters teaches all who reap to furnish God's altar with true offerings.

> From his ark
> The ancient sire descends, with all his train;
> Then, with uplifted hands and eyes devout,
> Grateful to Heaven, over his head beholds
> A dewy cloud, and in the cloud a bow
> Conspicuous with three listed colours gay,
> Betokening peace from God, and covenant new.

The cloud which had been the banner of doom a few months before becomes now the sign of promise and of hope. And have we not the assurance that so shall all clouds, to those who trust in God, become tabernacles of the rainbow of peace? Yesterday's cloud returns, without yesterday's fearful doom, but radiant with to-morrow's mercy. "I will look upon it," is the gracious and very human promise, as though the Heavenly Father would assure His child of earth that their eyes meet in the rainbow's radiant arch. When we are looking, He is looking too.

¶ The Hebrews had the unalterable conviction that God had entered into a covenant with their race, and that they had solemnly bound themselves to be His people and to serve Him. The covenant ideal was at once the consecration and the inspiration of the people. There was the spirit of duty and service and self-surrender in it; there was the spirit of power and freedom and invincibility in it. It is well known that the ideal of a nation in covenant with God has had an extraordinary fascination for the people of Scotland. Of its value and power one of the greatest of living Scotsmen has spoken thus: "A thought has played a large part in Scottish story. . . . Side by side with the intense type of personal piety there was, in Reformation and later days, an equally clear perception of the duty, not of a Church, but of a nation to its God. . . . When our typical form of individual piety is taken, as it ought always to be taken, along with the old desire to make the collective life of a community subserve the ends of righteousness, to make the nation an instrument of doing God's will on earth, our hereditary ideal of religion—I at least will not hesitate to avow it—is the grandest, the most catholic, the broadest which any Church or land has ever endeavoured to embody throughout the nineteen Christian centuries. The thought of a covenanted nation was both great and true—a thought most difficult in virtue of its greatness to apply in

adequate detail, but better fitted to raise men's daily practice out of selfishness and sin, and to make them fellow-workers with the risen Christ, than any separate thought in the history of the universal Church."[1]

VI.

A Sinner.

And Noah began to be an husbandman, and planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done unto him.—Gen. ix. 20–24.

1. What remains to be told of Noah is full of moral significance. Rare indeed is a wholly good man; and happy indeed is he who throughout his youth, his manhood, and his age lets principle govern all his actions. The righteous and rescued Noah lying drunk on his tent-floor is a sorrowful spectacle. God had given him the earth, and this was the use he made of the gift; melancholy presage of the fashion of his posterity. He had God to help him to bear his responsibilities, to refresh and gladden him; but he preferred the fruit of his vineyard. Can the most sacred or impressive memories secure a man against sin? Noah had the memory of a race drowned for sin and of a year in solitude with God. Can the dignity and weight of responsibility steady a man? This man knew that to him God had declared His purpose and that he alone could carry it forward to fulfilment. In that heavy, helpless figure, fallen insensible in his tent, is as significant a warning as in the Flood.

¶ It might be thought that one such flood as this would keep the world in order for ever, whereas men now doubt whether there ever was such a flood, and repeat all the sins of which the age of Noah was guilty. You would think that to see a man hanged would put an end to ruffianism for ever, whereas history goes to show that within the very shadow of the gallows men hatch the most detestable and alarming crimes. Set it down as a fact that

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 103.

punishment, though necessary, even in its severest forms can never regenerate the heart of man.[1]

2. It must be admitted that the protraiture of Noah would hardly have been so human as it is, without the relation of some inconsistencies, even some grievous sins. The truth of it shines out the more for this apparent flaw, in contrast with all the lying epitaphs and false panegyrics which later and more artificial ages have loved to heap upon pious mediocrity. And it is more consonant with reason to account for the falls of holy men by the frailty natural to man than to see in the Scriptural records of them an ascription of imperfect morality to the God whose especial favour is declared to have rested upon them. If we are easily shocked at the contemplation of the errors or crimes into which men have fallen, the general course of whose life had been guided and governed by spiritual influence, we should at least remember the saying that "the worst corruption is that which befalls the best." The falls of great and highly gifted souls are likely to be more terrible than those of smaller natures, to which the strong gusts of passion, the mighty struggles of conflicting impulses, are unknown. We know that the sinful woman in the Gospel was forgiven much, because she loved much. And when we read of an heroic figure like Noah or like David; one who like Noah has shown great boldness for truth and holiness in the face of bitter opposition, and risen in his daily life and practice to levels far above the common morality of his generation; or one who, like David, has kept alive a tender conscience in the vitiated atmosphere of an Oriental Court, and in spite of the guilty plaudits of corrupt companions, in spite of the stolid indifference of a society that custom and use have taught to tolerate the most flagrant wrongs, has agonized under the secret lash of remorse and the bitter pains of self-reproach, has at last in utter self-abasement cast himself down at the Throne of Mercy as a suppliant for that Divine forgiveness which alone can restore peace to his soul—when we read of such transgressions, followed by such voluntary self-humiliation, such profound penitence, can we doubt that He is faithful and just who forgives the sin and restores the sinner to His favour?

(1) Noah's sin brings before us two facts about sin. First,

[1] Joseph Parker.

the smaller temptations are often the most effectual. The man who is invulnerable on the field of battle amidst declared and strong enemies falls an easy prey to the assassin in his own home. When all the world was against him, Noah was able to face single-handed both scorn and violence, but in the midst of his vineyard, among his own people, who understood him and needed no preaching or proof of his virtue, he relaxed.

(2) Secondly, we see here how a man may fall into new forms of sin, and are reminded especially of one of the most distressing facts to be observed in the world, viz. that men in their prime and even in their old age are sometimes overtaken in sins of sensuality from which hitherto they have kept themselves pure. We are very ready to think we know the full extent of wickedness to which we may go; that by certain sins we shall never be much tempted. And in some of our predictions we may be correct; our temperament or our circumstances may absolutely preclude some sins from mastering us. Yet who has made but a slight alteration in his circumstances, added a little to his business, made some new family arrangements, or changed his residence, without being astonished to find how many new sources of evil seem to have been opened within him?

¶ Says Bushnell: "Every person of a mature age, and in his right mind, remembers turns or crises in his life, where he met the question of wrong face to face, and by a hard inward struggle broke through the sacred convictions of duty that rose up to fence him back. It was some new sin to which he had not become familiar, so much worse perhaps in degree as to be the entrance to him consciously of a new stage of guilt. He remembers how it shook his soul and even his body; how he shrunk in guilty anticipation from the new step of wrong; the sublime misgiving that seized him, the awkward and but half-possessed manner in which it was taken, and then afterward, perhaps even after years have passed away, how, in some quiet hour of the day or wakeful hour of night, as the recollection of that deed—not a public crime, but a wrong, or an act of vice—returned upon him, the blood rushed back for the moment on his fluttering heart, the pores of his skin opened and a kind of agony of shame and self-condemnation, in one word of remorse, seized his whole person. This is the consciousness, the guilty pang, of sin; every man knows what it is. We have also observed this peculiarity in such experiences; that it makes no difference at all what tempta-

tions we were under; we probably enough do not think of them; our soul appears to scorn apology, as if some higher nature within, speaking out of its eternity, were asserting its violated rights, chastising the insult done to its inborn affinities with immutable order and divinity, and refusing to be further humbled by the low pleadings of excuse and disingenuous guilt. To say, at such a time, the woman tempted me, I was weak, I was beguiled, I was compelled by fear and overcome, signifies nothing. The wrong was understood, and that suffices."[1]

VII.

A Giver of Blessing and of Cursing.

And Noah awoke from his sleep, and knew what his youngest son had done unto him. And he said,

Cursed be Canaan;
A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

And he said,

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem;
And let Canaan be his servant.
God enlarge Japheth,
And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
And let Canaan be his servant.—Gen. ix. 24-27.

1. The sin of Noah became the occasion of the blessing upon Shem and Japheth; but also, alas, of the cursing of Ham. For Noah's sin brought to light the character of his three sons—the coarse irreverence of Ham, the dignified delicacy and honour of Shem and Japheth. The bearing of men towards the sins of others is always a touchstone of character. The full exposure of sin where good is expected to come of the exposure and when it is done with sorrow and with shame is one thing, and the exposure of sin to create a laugh and merely to amuse is another. They are the true descendants of Ham, whether their faces be black or white, and whether they go with no clothes or with clothes that are the product of much thought and anxiety, who find pleasure in the mere contemplation of deeds of shame—in real life, on the boards of the theatre, in daily journals, or in works of fiction. Extremes meet, and the savage grossness of Ham is found in many who count themselves the last and finest

[1] T. T. Munger, *Horace Bushnell*, 218.

product of culture. It is found also in the harder and narrower set of modern investigators who glory in exposing the scientific weakness of our forefathers, and make a jest of the mistakes of men to whom they owe much of their freedom, and whose shoe latchet they are not worthy to tie, so far as the deeper moral qualities go.

2. Deeply moved by what had occurred, and discerning from it the characters of his sons, Noah in an elevated, impassioned strain, pronounces upon them a curse and a blessing. It was an ancient belief that a father's curse or blessing was not merely the expression of an earnestly felt hope or wish, but that it exerted a real power in determining a child's future; and hence the existing later condition of a tribe or people is often in the Old Testament referred to the words supposed to have been pronounced by a patriarchal ancestor upon its progenitor.

¶ We may call the words addressed by Noah to his three sons a prophetical interpretation of history. Canaan, Shem, and Japheth are not individuals; they are personifications, representing the nationalities of which they were the reputed ancestors, and reflecting their respective characters. "The curse of Canaan is the curse pronounced against Israel's greatest foe and constant source of moral temptation; the shamelessness of Ham reflects the impression produced by the sensuality of the Canaanite upon the minds of the worshippers of Jehovah." And the curse takes the form of political subjection, which is the natural penalty of long-continued moral degradation, and of physical enervation, which inevitably accompanies it. The purer religion possessed by the Hebrews is the thought determining the blessing of Shem. The width of territory and expansiveness characteristic of the Japhethites explains the terms used of Japheth. Thus, taken as a whole, the blessing defines in outline the position and historical significance of the three great ethnical groups, which were referred to Noah as their ancestor. It contrasts their differing characters; and holds out to each correspondingly different prospects for the future. It thus interprets the history "prophetically," *i.e.* not predictively, but eliciting from it the providential purposes of which it is the expression.[1]

¶ The fortunes of the peoples descended from Noah are determined in accordance with their deeds. These deeds, if also influenced by external relations, correspond with certain peculiari-

[1] S. R. Driver.

ties and fundamental tendencies of their character, which can be traced back to their beginnings. A similar way of regarding such matters, deeper than the ordinary, prevails throughout in the Old Testament. As, *e.g.*, in the child Jacob, the nature of the future man shows itself, and in him again that of the future people of Israel, so it is also with other peoples. The beginnings are decisive, and for the character of these beginnings actions apparently indifferent are often very significant tokens. So, then, the miserable condition into which the peoples of the Canaanitish race had already sunk by the time of our author, was also nothing accidental. It was the necessary consequence and the merited recompense of the moral perversity—especially of the want of chastity in their home life, the licentiousness in sexual matters, and the shameless customs which clung to them from early times—which can be traced back to their very beginnings, and show themselves also among other members of the Hamitic group of nations. Ruined by their vices, they early fell a prey to peoples morally more healthy, above all to the Israelites, and the remnants of them which are left will sink deeper and deeper into servitude; whereas victory will be the final portion of those peoples in whom the true faith of God flourishes, and who allow themselves to be led by His discipline. These thoughts, which history had already made plain, and which the course of the following centuries confirmed, are here shortly and sharply comprised in a few words of curse and of blessing, which the ancestor of these peoples pronounced over his three sons, on the occasion of a domestic occurrence. They are intended to inform us, at the entrance into the wide domain of the history of the peoples, regarding their character and future, and indelibly to impress upon our minds the lessons which lie in the history of the nations. But the curse and blessing of a father have power and effect, especially those of a man of God, as Noah was.[1]

¶ My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are fresh in my heart as if it had been yesterday; and tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then, whenever memory steals me away to the scene. For the last half-mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence,—my father, as was often his custom, carrying hat in hand, while his long, flowing yellow hair (then yellow, but in later years white as snow) streamed like a girl's down his shoulders. His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me, and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech was vain.

[1] A. Dillmann, *Genesis*, i. 303.

We halted on reaching the appointed parting-place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said,—"God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you, and keep you from all evil!" Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I ran off as fast as I could, and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him.[1]

[1] *John G. Paton: An Autobiography*, i. 40.

ABRAHAM.

I.

Ur and Haran.

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Ur and Haran.

And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.—Gen. xi. 31.

Wade (*Old Testament History*, 1901, p. 75) gives the following synopsis of the history of Abraham:—

The Bible narrative relates that Terah, leaving Ur of the Chaldees for Canaan, died at Haran, and that Abraham, with his wife Sarai, proceeded thence to their original destination, in obedience to a Divine monition which was accompanied by the assurance that he would have an extensive posterity, and that his good fortune would be such that his name would become current in formulas of blessing. The subsequent history of Abraham as given in Genesis (xii.–l.) is as follows:—

Abram, with his wife and his nephew Lot, crossing the Jordan, advanced, by way of Shechem (where Jehovah appearing to him promised the land to his seed) and Bethel, towards the south part of what was afterwards Judæa. Thence he was driven by famine into Egypt, where the beauty of his wife (who at her husband's direction had passed herself off as his sister) attracted the notice of the Pharaoh, who took her; but in consequence of divinely sent plagues, restored her. Returning to the south of Canaan, he found his substance so increased that at Bethel he was compelled to separate from his nephew, receiving there at the same time a renewal of the promise respecting the future extent of his posterity and its possession of Canaan. Lot settled in Sodom, whilst Abram himself dwelt near Kiriath-Arba (Hebron), entering into an alliance with three Amorite chieftains, Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. Sodom and four neighbouring cities, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (Zoar), were at this time subject to an Elamite dynasty ruling in Babylonia, which had re-asserted the authority once exercised in Palestine by the native Babylonian princes. But a revolt, headed by the king of Sodom, was made

against the Elamite rule; and to suppress it, the Elamite king Chedorlaomer invaded the country in company with his allies Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar (Larsa), and Tidal, perhaps of Gutim. The route followed was through the country E. of Jordan and the Dead Sea as far as El-paran (probably the later Elath), thence N. and W. by En-mishpat (the later Kadesh Barnea) and Hazezon Tamer (Engedi) to the vale of Siddim, near Sodom and the marge of the Dead Sea. There a battle was fought, the king of Sodom and his allies were defeated, and Sodom and Gomorrah plundered, Lot being included among the captives. Abram, on hearing of the capture of his relative, armed his trained slaves, numbering 318, and with his Amorite confederates went in chase of the enemy as they retired in the direction of Damascus, and in a night attack near Laish or Leshem (the later Dan), which was followed by a pursuit as far as Hobah (N. of Damascus), succeeded in recovering both the captives and the spoil. On his return he was blessed by Melchizedek the priest-king of Salem (Urusalim or Jerusalem), to whom he gave a tenth of the booty taken, at the same time refusing for himself a share of the spoils, and accepting it only for his Amorite companions.

Abram at this period had no son, but he was again assured in a vision that he would have a numerous posterity; and on his requesting a sign, he was told to offer a sacrifice, and after dividing the victims, to place the several portions opposite each other. Then at sunset Abram fell into a deep sleep, and in the darkness, fire and flame passed between the pieces, and Jehovah made a covenant with him, declaring that his descendants, after a period of enslavement in a foreign land, would eventually possess Canaan. Subsequently his wife gave to him her handmaid Hagar, an Egyptian, who conceived by him; but before the child's birth she was harshly treated by Sarai (whose barrenness she now despised) and fled, only returning by command of an angel, who appeared to her by a well afterwards called Beer-lahai-roi, and who foretold the child's destiny. The son whom she bore was named Ishmael. Thirteen years after this, the Divine promises were for the fifth time renewed to Abram, to whom it was declared that his wife should bear a son. The names of both his wife and himself were changed from Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah, and the practice of circumcision was invested with a religious significance. Subsequently the assurance that Sarah should have a son was repeated by three celestial visitants in human form, who also intimated that Sodom and Gomorrah (where Lot still dwelt) would be destroyed for their wickedness, which was too great for Abraham's intercession to avail to save them. The cities were

afterwards consumed by fire, Lot being led out of Sodom by two angels. On the way, his wife, disobeying the command not to look back, was turned into a pillar of salt. Lot took refuge in a cave near Zoar, and there unwittingly became by his two daughters the father of two sons, Moab and Ben Ammi, the ancestors of the Moabites and Ammonites. Abraham next journeyed again to the South, and sojourned at Gerar, where the incident which had occurred in Egypt was repeated in connection with the king of Gerar, Abimelech, with whom also Abraham had a quarrel respecting certain wells of water, which was brought to a close by a covenant between them at Beersheba. Eventually Sarah became a mother, and bore to her husband a son who was named Isaac. Ishmael, being detected mocking Isaac, was, on Sarah's appeal, expelled with his mother Hagar; and ultimately made his home in the wilderness of Paran. After this, Abraham, in obedience to a Divine command, given to prove him, prepared to sacrifice his only son Isaac on a mountain in the land of Moriah, three days' journey from Beersheba; but when the preparations were completed, he was forbidden to harm his son, and substituted instead a ram. In consequence of his trust in Jehovah and his readiness to sacrifice, in accordance with His injunctions, the child upon whom his hopes rested, the blessings previously assured to him were for the seventh, and last, time renewed. Sarah died subsequently to this, and was buried in the cave at Machpelah near Kiriath-Arba (Hebron) which Abraham had purchased. By another wife named Keturah Abraham became the progenitor of several sons, Midian, Medan, and others. Before his death, he sent his servant to Bethuel, the son of his brother Nahor, who still dwelt in Haran, to arrange a marriage between Isaac and Bethuel's daughter Rebekah. Abraham was one hundred and seventy-five years old when he died; and was buried with his wife at Machpelah.

I.

Introduction.

1. Of all the characters of early Bible history, there is hardly one that stands out with greater prominence than the patriarch Abraham. And not only is it his history and personality that are important, the historical facts touched upon in the course of his biography are equally so. Facts concerning the ancient East, from Babylonia on the east to Egypt on the west, face the reader

as he goes through that attractive narrative, and make him wonder at the state of society, the political situation, and the beliefs of the people which should have made his migrations possible, brought about the monotheistic belief which characterizes his life and that of his descendants, and enabled him and his sons after him to attain such a goodly store of the riches of this world.

2. Standing as the traditional father of the race among the mists of dim antiquity, it was inevitable that the character of Abraham should be idealized. In the stories which they have preserved, each group of Biblical writers has sketched its ideal. In the Judæan prophetic narratives Abraham is the friend of God, the man of perfect faith who in a cruel, selfish, warring age lived at peace with all men. Indifferent concerning the present, his supreme joy was in the Divine promises regarding his descendants. Although a son of Adam he is represented as attaining that intimate and harmonious acquaintance with God which was originally the possession of the first man. In the Ephraimite narrative he is called, and is pictured as, a prophet, in dreams foreseeing the future, intent only upon carrying out the Divine command, even though it cost him his dearest possession, and ever personally directed and protected by God. In the Priestly narrative he is the ideal servant of the law, conforming punctiliously, according to his dim light, to the demands of the ritual. In the independent narrative of Gen. xiv. he figures in a very different rôle. Instead of being afraid to call his wife his own, he is the fearless knight, who with a handful of men puts to flight the allied armies of Elam and Babylonia, and magnanimously restores to the plundered cities all the captured spoil, except something for his Amorite companions and a portion for the priest of the Most High. Later Jewish traditions make him also the conqueror of Damascus; while another group of stories pictures him as the apostle of monotheism, preaching to the idolatrous Babylonians and Egyptians the one true God. Another represents him as being borne in a fiery chariot to heaven, where he abides, receiving the faithful to his bosom. Christians and Moslems further modified and enlarged the portrait. Thus in succeeding ages, prophets, priests, patriots, and theologians all

projected their ideals into these concrete portraits of the father of their race. It is comparatively unimportant whether or not there was a man at the beginning of Hebrew history who possessed all the virtues and the spiritual enlightenment attributed to him by later generations. Abraham is more than an historical figure, he is the embodiment of those exalted ideals which made the Israelites what they were.

3. Many rays of interest focus in the story of Abraham. His portrait is drawn with such detail that it lives before us, with the same hopes and fears, golden hours and hours of depression, that are familiar factors in our own lives. Then, also, his life is so constantly referred to in the Old Testament, and in the New, that it would seem as if the right understanding of it is necessary to give us the clue to many a difficult passage, and many a sacred doctrine, in the succeeding pages of the Bible. Nor can it fail to interest us to discover the reason why the wild Bedouin of the desert and the modern Englishman—the conservative East, and the progressive and swift-moving West; the Muhammadan and the Christian—can find in the tent of the first Hebrew a common meeting-ground, and in himself a common origin.

¶ Professor Max Müller, in a well-known Essay on Semitic Monotheism published many years ago, has a remarkable passage on the great place which belongs to Abraham in the history, not of the Jews alone, but of the human race. He says that faith in the one living God, wherever it exists—that is, as a real religious force, not merely as a philosophical speculation—"may be traced back to one man,—to him in whom 'all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" "We see in him," he continues, "the life-spring of that faith which was to unite all the nations of the earth. We want to know more of that man than we do; but even with the little we know of him he stands before us as a figure second only to one in the whole history of the world."[1]

That is a remarkable estimate; I am not sure that it is an exaggeration. The Lord Jesus Christ stands apart and alone—in a supremacy which removes Him from all comparison with even the greatest of mankind. But there is no other that can be placed by the side of Abraham, if we estimate his greatness by the immense and beneficial effect of his life and character on the condition of mankind.[2]

[1] *Chips from a German Workshop*, i. 373. [2] R. W. Dale.

¶ One simple fact serves to measure the evangelical importance which attaches to the biography of Abraham. In some fourteen or fifteen passages of the New Testament we find his place in the unfolding of revelation distinctly referred to. In several of these passages incidents of his career are carefully discussed, in order to illustrate or confirm cardinal principles of the gospel. Our Lord Himself in His controversy with the Jews, St. Paul in his two leading theological epistles, St. James, and the anonymous writer to the Hebrews, all devote long passages to the exposition of Abraham's position or of the lessons of his life. In fact, the section of the Book of Genesis in which this patriarch's career has been recorded may be called the principal as well as the earliest seed-plot of evangelical teaching; the original field, as it were, in which God sowed those germs of revealed truth which were to ripen through many a changeful century into the harvest of the Christian gospel.[1]

II.

Historicity.

1. In dealing with the life of Abraham, as with the patriarchal period in general, we must bear in mind that the age to be investigated is, relatively speaking, prehistoric. The available documents, in their final shape at least, belong to an age removed by an interval of several centuries from the events. The narrative which is generally held by critics to be the earliest, that of the Jehovist, seems indeed to be based on ancient popular tradition, but it describes the age of the patriarchs as in some essential respects so closely similar to later periods that it can only be regarded as a picture of primitive life and religion drawn in the light of a subsequent age. We have here to do with the earliest form of history, traditional folklore about primitive personages and events, worked up according to some preconceived design by a devout literary artist. The question at once naturally arises how these narratives are to be employed and interpreted. As is well known, some very extreme conclusions have been advanced by critics, as, for example, that the patriarchs are not real historical personages at all, but mere personifications of particular Semitic tribes. Some writers maintain that "Abraham," "Isaac,"

[1] J. O. Dykes, *Abraham*, 12.

and "Jacob" are titles of primitive tribal deities. It may at once be pointed out that while no convincing reasons have ever been alleged for doubting the historic personality of the great patriarchs, there are some considerations which materially support the traditional view. There are of course historical points respecting which the verdict of a purely literary criticism cannot be final, and its more or less provisional conclusions need to be supplemented or even corrected by archæological data.

(1) The discoveries of recent years have admittedly shown that during the age in which Hebrew tradition places the patriarchs there was much more intercourse between Palestine and the Far East than was formerly suspected—a circumstance which increases the probability that a genuine historical substratum underlies the patriarchal narratives.

(2) Again, there is a striking element of internal consistency in the story of the patriarchs. It fits in with known facts; it accounts for subsequent developments. The entire course of events in the Mosaic period seems to presuppose the nomad and migratory stage which tradition connects with the person of Abraham and his immediate descendants. As Professor Kittel, following Dillmann, points out, "the religious position of Moses stands before us unsupported and incomprehensible," unless we accept the tradition which traces to the patriarchs the rudiments at least of a higher religion and the first tentative occupation of the promised land. The fact-basis which underlies the story of Abraham's call may be his migration from Chaldæa, dictated by motives of "vague dissatisfaction with prevalent religious beliefs and practices, rather than a new clearly conceived idea of God." Thus we may hold it to be intrinsically probable that so unique a history as that of the elect people had precisely such a beginning as the Book of Genesis relates.

¶ The wells of Beersheba in the wide frontier-valley of Palestine are indisputable witnesses of the life of Abraham.[1]

¶ Before there was an Israelitish nation and commonwealth, before there was a Mosaic law as the foundation for that commonwealth, there was formed between the heart of the Father in heaven and a solitary heart, which sought God above nature, a covenant of personal intercourse, of fatherly disclosures and filial

[1] A. P. Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, 148.

acts of confidence, which continued and was developed as a sacred tradition—first in a family of friends of God, and then in a nation growing out of the family; and that covenant was the germ of the religion of salvation for all the nations of the earth. That is the element of most certain truth in the Biblical story of Abraham which the penetration of the Apostle discovers.[1]

2. While, however, in receiving the narrative as substantially true, though coloured by later prophetic conceptions of Israel's history, we are accepting an account which is entirely consistent with all that we otherwise know respecting the redemptive methods of Almighty God, we have no interest in denying a certain element of idealization in the description of the primitive period. There may possibly be an element of truth even in the view that the figures of the patriarchs are tribal personifications. We may agree with Baethgen that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are historical persons, but that "these personalities are invested with the characteristics which afterwards marked the tribes descended from them." It is likely enough that the great figures of the remote past were made the subjects of many popular legends and traditions, and it is no doubt possible that to a certain extent a tribal history may have been expressed in a personal and individual form.

¶ The substance of the narrative is, no doubt, historical; though the characters and experiences seem to be idealized. We cannot, for instance, suppose that we have, so to say, a photographic record of all that was said or done; however difficult it may be to estimate the strength of memory and of oral tradition in these patriarchal times, when the conditions were so different from our own, it is scarcely possible that the recollection of such minutiæ as are here often recorded should have been transmitted unaltered during the many centuries that intervened between the time at which the patriarchs lived, and that at which their biographies were ultimately committed to writing.[2]

(1) The narratives of Genesis present in the main a faithful picture of the general conditions of patriarchal life, especially in respect of its moral characteristics. A Hebrew writer, we must remember, would be continually in a position to observe with his

[1] W. J. Moulton, *The Witness of Israel*, 36.
[2] S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 143.

own eyes the habits and customs of primitive civilization; among the tribes of Bedouin Arabs on the east side of the Jordan, some of the unchanging features of nomadic shepherd life may be witnessed to this day. The oldest narrative, though coloured by prophetic idealism, gives a vivid portrait of patriarchal life: its simple forms of worship, its family priesthood, its sacrificial feasts, its sacred customs and social institutions. Moreover, there are features in the story which point to a comparatively low standard of ethical and religious development, especially the use of cunning and violence, together with a certain element of sexual licence. We notice also obvious traces of the close affinity that existed between the religion of the Hebrew patriarchs and the common ideas and practices of the neighbouring Semitic tribes; the notion, for instance, that the revelation of Deity was confined to certain definite spots such as Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Beersheba; the reverence paid to sacred pillars, trees, and other emblems which were regarded as monuments and tokens of a special presence of God; and the use of teraphim for oracular purposes, a custom which apparently lingered to a comparatively late period. These indications of a very rudimentary religious condition are valuable, not only as enhancing the credibility of the narratives, but also as deepening our consciousness of the Divine influence which actually guided the Hebrew race from the first, controlling the development of faith, accepting what was rude and primitive as a needful stage in a constant upward movement, and gradually raising the ancestors of Israel above the general level of their age.

(2) In the patriarchal tradition we may reasonably contend that we have a faithful representation of the two principal factors which determined the distinctive character of Israel's religion: viz. a personal and redemptive operation of God in history on the one hand, and the response of human faith on the other. If we wished to select the master-thought of the Old Testament, we should be justified in saying that it is belief in the providence and direct action of the living God. Certainly this was the point of view from which the writers of the Pentateuchal narratives described the early stages of the history; it was the standpoint from which the prophets reviewed and interpreted Israel's wonderful past.

¶ The intense interest in the narratives of Abraham, which has led some earnest souls to inaugurate the so-called warfare between archæology and criticism, springs, of course, from the part that the conception of Abraham has played in the development of the Jewish and Christian faiths. Abraham as an ideal is, however, a solid part of the history of the world's best religion, and the permanent value of the ideal is independent of the results of criticism of the patriarchal narratives or the investigations of archæologists. The ideal was real, whether woven about a mythical, a half-legendary, or an historical character. It represented for centuries Israel's conception of her own call and mission. It was not, however, a constant quantity, and the fact that it varied is true, whether Abraham was real or not. To J, Abraham was the ideal devout nomad, who was obedient to Yahweh's call (Gen. xii. 1 ff.), who believed in Yahweh and it was accounted to him righteousness (Gen. xv. 6); the type of a hospitable host, whom Yahweh deigns to visit (Gen. xviii. 1 ff.). To J, Abraham was the intercessor for the innocent, who would shield the Judge of the earth from the suspicion of having done wrong (Gen. xviii. 25). To E, Abraham was an ideal prophet of God, whom God protected, whose intercession He heard (Gen. xx.), and whose faith did not waver in the face of the hardest sacrifice (Gen. xxii.). To P, Abraham was the great ancestor of the nation, with whom God confirmed a covenant by the sacred and perpetual rite of circumcision (Gen. xvii.). Later Jews seem to have regarded Abraham as a man so holy that all his physical descendants were necessarily saints or children of God (cf. Dan. vii. 25; John viii. 33, 39). Paul regarded Abraham as an ideal exponent of faith, to whom souls of similar faith were akin (Rom. iv. 16); the great Johannine author regarded him as a moral ideal, to whom men of a similar moral stamp were related (John viii. 39*b*), and the idea very likely goes back to Jesus Himself. To the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Abraham is the type of the ideal world-pilgrim, or Christian, never satisfied with the transitory, who "sought for a city that hath the foundations" (Heb. xi. 10). A Jewish tradition embodied in Yalqut represents Abraham as the redeeming father, who will one day go to Gehenna and rescue from hell his unfortunate children who have been cast in thither.[1]

[1] G. A. Barton, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, xxviii. (1909) 166.

III.

Name.

The name Abram, of which Abiram is another form, may mean "the father is exalted" (cf. Jehoram); but the analogy of Abijah ("Jah is father") suggests that it signifies "Ram (? Ramman) is father." Abraham is probably only a dialectic variation of Abram; but in Gen. xvii. 5 the latter part of the name is brought into relation with the word *hâmôn*, "multitude," and the appellation is made to signify "father of a multitude of nations."

¶ In the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archæology*, 1894, p. 212, Professor Hommel announced that he had discovered the proper name A-bi-e-ra-mu on a contract published by Professor Meissner in his indispensable book, *Beiträge zum Altbabylonischen Privatrecht*, No. 111. The original is in the Royal Museum of Berlin, catalogued VAT 1473, and has the contract in duplicate, that is, the contract on the tablet is copied on to the outer case, and both copies are intact. Hommel repeated his discovery in several books, and it misled Professor Sayce in his *Early History of the Hebrews*, and Dr. Pinches in his *Old Testament in the Light of the Historical Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, but the latter has corrected the matter in his third edition, 1908. As a matter of fact the name does not stand on the tablet, but both inner and outer copies have A-bi-e-ra-aḫ, as Dr. Ranke correctly read in his *Personal Names of the Hammurabi Dynasty*, p. 58. The text has been republished in the official publications of the Berlin Museum, *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler*, vol. viii. No. 12. The word in question occurs at line 18 on the tablet, and 19 on the case. Professor Driver also corrects this error in the seventh edition of his *Book of Genesis*, p. xlix.

The name, however, does occur several times on tablets, in the Berlin Museum, published in vol. vii. of the same series, and Dr. Ungnad has recently called attention to this fact in his edition of some letters from Dilbat, *Beiträge zur Assyriologie*, vol. vi. part 1. The tablets are from Dilbat, dated in the reign of Ammizaduga, fourth successor of Ammurabi, contemporary of the Biblical Abraham.

These texts leave no possible doubt as to the fact that the name Abram was current in the days of Ḫammurabi. The Hebrew tradition evidently preserved two pronunciations, one Abam-ra-'-am, and one Abam-ra-am. The former would be the

original Babylonian uncontracted form, with hiatus to represent an elided guttural. It is this form which lies at the basis of Hebrew *Abraham* where the *h* represents the Babylonian breathing. Naturally *Abram* is nothing but the Babylonian contracted form. The Hebrews later took the two words for different roots, but their philological explanation in Gen. xvii. 5 had better be passed over in silence. It is one of those philological monstrosities in which both Babylonian and Hebrew too often indulged. The word is apparently South Arabian, from a root *ra'm*, "to love." The later Arabic pronounced the perfect *ra'ima*, "he loved," the imperfect *iar'amū*. The forms *râma, ra-am-râm* appear to be the infinitive or imperative. At any rate the usual Hebrew derivation from *rum*, "to be exalted," is excluded by the fact that the Babylonian has *abū* in the accusative. The name means apparently, "love the father."[1]

IV.

Birthplace.

1. Ur, the patriarch's birthplace, the modern Mukayyar, was built on the western bank of the Euphrates, not far from Eridu, the ancient seaport of the country. Its name signified "The City," and was given to it by the Semitic population, for whom it was the leading city of the world. It was a great centre of Western Semitic trade. On the one hand, the maritime trade of Eridu was poured into it, "the ships of Ur" having much the same meaning as "the ships of Tarshish" in the Old Testament; on the other hand, it stood on the edge of the Arabian desert, and was therefore in close touch with the "Amorite" peoples of the West. It was, in fact, a meeting-place of the civilized Babylonian and the less cultured Arab, the spot at which merchants and officials, agriculturists and nomad herdsmen would have gathered together. Its foreign population must have been considerable. Just as in Egypt to-day the wealthier Bedouins settle down and become more or less peaceable townsmen and villagers, so in Ur the wealthier Bedouins of the desert would have had a tendency to do the same. Here, too, would have come merchants and traders from various parts of the Semitic world. Among them were numbers of "commercial travellers"

[1] S. Langdon, in *The Expository Times*, xxi. (1909) 90.

(*damqari*), who travelled on behalf of their Babylonian employers from one end of Western Asia to the other, and about whom we hear a good deal in the cuneiform texts.

Two or three centuries before Abraham a dynasty of kings ruled over Babylonia for 117 years who made Ur their capital. Wherever their traders had gone, the soldiers of Ur followed. We hear of campaigns in the Lebanon, and the last king of the dynasty fell while endeavouring to suppress a revolt in Elam. Babylonia was already an Imperial power, and claimed to be mistress of Western Asia. Its rulers regarded the Tigris and Euphrates as belonging to them; from their sources to the sea the two great rivers seemed to be of right the possession of the Babylonian kings. Along their banks the agents of the Babylonian commercial firms made their way; silver and copper were brought from the mines of Cappadocia, the cedars of Amanus were floated down the Euphrates, and the pine-logs of Armenia down the Tigris, while the alluvial plain of Babylonia received its stone from the quarries of the Lebanon.

¶ There have been many discussions as to the position of Ur of the Chaldees. Some, on account of the distance from Canaan, apparently, have contended that Ur of the Chaldees is the same as the site known for many hundreds of years as Urfa, in Mesopotamia — the district in which the proto-martyr, St. Stephen (Acts vii. 2, 41), places it. Mesopotamia, however, is an appellation of wide extent, and altogether insufficiently precise to enable the exact locality to be determined. To all appearance, though, Urfa or Orfa, called by the Greeks Edessa, was known as Orrha at the time of Isidore of Charax (date about 150 B.C.). Pocock, in his *Description of the East*, states that it is the universal opinion of the Jews that Orfa or Edessa was the ancient Ur of the Chaldees, and this is supported by local tradition, the chief place of worship there being called "the Mosque of Abraham," and the pond in which the sacred fish are kept being called *Bahr Ibrahím el-Halíl*, "the lake of Abraham the Beloved." The tradition in the Talmud and in certain early Arabian writers, that Ur of the Chaldees is Warka, the Ὀρχόη of the Greeks, and Ὀρεχ of the Septuagint, need not detain us, as this site is certainly the Erech of Gen. x. 10, and is excluded by that circumstance.

The identification generally accepted is, that Ur of the Chaldees is the series of mounds now called Mugheir, or, more in

accordance with correct pronunciation, Mukayyar, "the pitchy," from the noun *qîr*, "pitch," that material having been largely used in the construction of the buildings whose ruins occupy the site. The identification of these ruins with those of Ur-kasdim, or Ur of the Chaldees, was first proposed by Sir Henry Rawlinson in 1855, on the ground that the name of the city on the bricks found there, which he read Hur, resembled that of the name as given in Gen. xi. 28 and 31. As a matter of fact, the Semitic Babylonian form of the name approaches even nearer than the celebrated Assyriologist then thought, for it is given in the bilingual texts as Uru. The Akkadian form (which is most probably the more ancient of the two), on the other hand, is not so satisfactory, as it contains an additional syllable, the full form being Uriwa (the vowel before the *w* only is a little doubtful). This, with the absence of any addition corresponding to the Hebrew *Kasdim*, is the principal flaw in what would otherwise be a perfect philological comparison.[1]

2. Many legends concerning Abraham—legends of sufficiently high antiquity—exist, but how far they are trustworthy must always be a matter of opinion. In any case, the writers had the advantage—if advantage it was—of living 2000 years nearer to Abraham's time than we do. Thus Eupolemus states that in the tenth generation, in the city of Babylonia called Camarina (which by some is called Urie, and which signifies a city of the Chaldæans), there lived, the thirteenth in descent, Abraham, a man of a noble race, and superior to all others in wisdom. They relate of him that he was the inventor of astrology and Chaldæan magic, and that on account of his eminent piety he was esteemed by God. It is said, moreover, that under the direction of God he departed and lived in Phœnicia, and there taught the Phœnicians the motions of the sun and moon, and all other things, and was on that account held in great reverence by their king.

¶ The alleged birthplace of Abraham at Berzen, near Damascus, affords Moslems a reason for seeking the patriarch there, by vows and prayers, as the place of his revelation, since his mother is said to have given him birth in a hole of the rock. She remained with him three days, and then putting his finger in his mouth, left him. There he abode, according to the legend, seven years. The shrine, which affords a dwelling for the minister

[1] T. G. Pinches, *The Old Testament in the Light of the Historical Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (1903), 192.

on the same court, is especially interesting, because on a sheet of paper posted on the wall, all visitors who are in trouble are invited to make known their sorrows to the well. "Advice to people who visit this place, where is Abraham, father of Isaac, the sacrificed, the grandfather of the prophets! Come, tell him all your adversities and hardships, and he will help you." It will be noticed that nothing is suggested as to his intercession with God for them. The people are bidden to come to him as the sole source of their comfort.[1]

3. Why is Ur called "Ur of the Chaldees"? This is no Babylonian designation of Ur, and must be an addition of Palestinian origin. *Kasdim* is the Heb. form of the Bab. and Ass. *Kaldû* ("Chaldæans"), a tribe named often in the inscriptions from 880 B.C.; their home at that time was in Lower Babylonia (the Persian Gulf is called the "sea of the land of Kaldû"); afterwards, as they increased in power, they gradually advanced inland: in 721 Merodach-baladan, "king of the land of Kaldû," made himself for twelve years king of Babylon; and ultimately, under Nabopolassar (625–605) and Nebuchadnezzar (604–561), the Kaldû became the ruling caste in Babylonia. "Ur Kasdim" is mentioned besides in xi. 28, xv. 7; Neh. ix. 7.

4. In whatever part of Babylonia the patriarch may have sojourned, of one thing there is no doubt, and that is, that if he dwelt there, the life which he saw around him, and in which he must have taken part, was that depicted by the Sumerian tablets preserved in the British Museum. He saw the idolatry of the people, and the ceremonies and infamies which accompanied it; he saw the Babylonians as they were in his day, with all their faults, and all their virtues—their industry, their love of trade, their readiness to engage in litigation, and all the other interesting characteristics which distinguished them. He must have been acquainted with their legends of the Creation, the Flood, and all their gods and heroes; and the poetry for which the Hebrew race has always been renowned must have had its origin in the land of Nimrod, whence Abraham of old went forth free, and his descendants, a millennium and a half later, returned as captives.

It is apparent from several indications in the early Jewish

[1] S. I. Curtiss, *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day* (1902), 81.

books that Abraham belonged to a race, not of monotheists, but of men who worshipped false gods. When Jacob left his uncle Laban in Padan-aram, Laban complained that he had taken away his gods (Gen. xxxi. 30). And when he had returned to Palestine and was coming near to Bethel, Jacob said to his household and to all that were with him, "Put away the strange gods that are among you . . . and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God" (Gen. xxxv. 2, 3). And when the Jewish nations entered the promised land to take possession of it, Joshua is represented as saying, "Your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the River, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods. . . . If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. xxiv. 2, 15).

¶ How the revelation of God came to Abraham we do not know, but there is a charming legend known perhaps to most of us, but which I will venture to repeat for the sake of those who have never heard it. The scene, according to Dean Stanley, is laid sometimes in Ur, sometimes in the celebrated hill above Damascus. He gives the story in the form in which it is preserved in the Koran. "When night overshadowed him, Abraham saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord.' But when the star set he said, 'I like not those that set.' And when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my Lord.' But when the moon set, he answered 'Verily, if my Lord direct me not in the right way, I shall be as one of those who err.' And when he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my Lord. This is greater than the star or moon.' But when the sun went down, he said, 'O my people, I am clear of these things. I turn my face to Him who hath made the heaven and the earth.'"[1]

V.

Migration to Haran.

1. Why did Terah leave Ur? Possibly he may have been induced to move northwards by a desire to shake himself

[1] R. W. Dale.

free from customs he disapproved. The Hebrews themselves seem always to have considered that his migration had a religious motive. "This people," says one of their old writings, "is descended from the Chaldæans, and they sojourned heretofore in Mesopotamia because they would not follow the gods of their fathers which were in the land of Chaldæa. For they left the way of their ancestors and worshipped the God of heaven, the God whom they knew; so they cast them out from the face of their gods, and they fled into Mesopotamia and sojourned there many days. Then their God commanded them to depart from the place where they sojourned and to go into the land of Canaan." But if this is a true account of the origin of the movement northwards, it must have been Abraham rather than his father who was the moving spirit of it; for it is certainly Abraham and not Terah who stands as the significant figure inaugurating the new era.

2. Concerning the journey of Abraham, there is naturally little to be said, the Bible narrative merely stating that Terah and his family migrated to Haran. The chief thing worth noting is that the distance they had to travel was sufficiently great—about 560 miles from Uriwa (Mugheir), and about 420 miles from Babylon, from the neighbourhood of which the family must have started if the Ur mentioned in Genesis be the Uri or Ura of the inscriptions, which was equivalent to the land of Akkad. The whole of this district was, in all probability, at this time, as later, under Babylonian rule, a state of things which must have contributed in some measure to the safe transit of the household to Haran, and also that of Abraham later on to Canaan, which, as we know from the inscriptions and from Gen. xiv., acknowledged Babylonian overlordship.

The early part of their way led through the rich warm Chaldæan levels; and having, as we suppose, crossed the great river and passed by Larsa and ancient Erech, and seen the ruins of great Babel, they would come to the twin cities of Sippara: and by and by rising near the great place of bitumen-pits, Hit, to the higher undulating country already occupied by tribes who had gone northwards to found the great dominion of Assur, they would leave behind the more advanced cultivation of their native

plains, and begin to encounter greater difficulties and untried dangers. But through whatever vicissitudes, in due time passing up the fertile valley of the Belîkh, the caravan, ascending towards the highlands, entered the resting-place of many years, a second home, which became so familiar and dear to Abraham that we find him in his old age calling it "my country; the house of my kindred." The region was called Padan-aram, the plain of the highlands, or simply Padan, as in Gen. xlviii. 7.

3. With regard to Haran, it is very probable that this ancient city was, by turns, under the rule either of Babylonia or of Assyria until the absorption of the former power into the great Persian Empire, when Haran likewise, in all probability, shared the same fate. Concerning the early history of the city very little is known, but it is not improbable that it was an ancient Babylonian foundation, the name being apparently the Babylonian word *ḫarranu*, meaning "road." The name given to this "road-city" is explained as originating in the fact that it lay at the junction of several trade-routes—an explanation which is very probable.

The city itself was, at the time of its greatest prosperity, a considerable place, as the remains now existing show. There are the ruins of a castle, with square columns 8 feet thick, supporting a roof 30 feet high, together with some comparatively modern ruins. The ancient walls, though in a very dilapidated state, are said to be continuous throughout. No houses remain, but there are several ruins, one of great interest and considerable extent, which Ainsworth considered to be a temple. A rudely sculptured lion, found outside the walls, is regarded as giving evidence of Assyrian occupation, which, however, is otherwise known to have been an historical fact.

In Abraham's time the place had, in all probability, not attained its fullest development, and must have been a small city. The plain in which it is situated is described as very fertile, but not cultivated to its fullest extent, on account of half the land remaining fallow because not manured.

4. Between Ur and Haran the common worship of the moon-god must have formed a special bond of union, and the citizen of Ur would have found in Haran a welcome, and all that he was

accustomed to at home. That Terah should have settled in Haran, therefore, was very natural. An inscription discovered at Sinjerli, north of the Gulf of Antioch, shows that among the Semites the moon-god of Haran bore the title of the "Baal of Haran." Haran was built on a tributary of the Belias (Assyrian, Balîkh; modern, Belîkh).

5. Thus far, then, have we followed Abraham in his search for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The migration from Ur to Haran may have been a general movement in which his family had a part, but that does not make it less the call of God. When Haran was reached, Abraham may have thought that he had gained the promised land. If so, he found the call come to him again (indeed in the mind of the historian the call *from* Haran was the chief if not the only direct call which Abraham received). For it is God's purpose with this man to make him the example of all those who are led by faith and not by sight, of those therefore who find no abiding place here, but look ever more and more clearly for that rest which remains for the people of God.

¶ It was said of a great writer that he had a nostalgia for the beautiful. Of Dr. Bonar it may be said that he had a nostalgia for heaven. All his life on earth he was homesick. He was of those who declare plainly that they seek a country. Looking over the first volume of his Hymns, I find such titles as "No more Sea," "The Change," "The Homesickness," "Dawn," "The Morning Star," "Hora Novissima," "Rest Yonder," "How Long?" "A Little While," "Not Very Far." These are but a few among many. In one early hymn he frankly names his pain. He speaks of his "dull weight of loneliness," of his "greedy cravings for the tomb," and says,

> It is not that I fear
> To breast the storm or wrestle with the wave,
> To swim the torrent or the blast to brave,
> To toil or suffer in this day of strife,
> As He may will who gave this struggling life;
> But I am homesick.

One has to go back to the Middle Ages to catch the same note of vehement desire. But in one of his least known but most revealing hymns he explains himself:—

My God, it is not fretfulness
That makes me say "How long?"
It is not heaviness of heart
That hinders me in song;
'Tis not despair of truth and right,
Nor coward dread of wrong.

But how can I, with such a hope
Of glory and of home,
With such a joy before my eyes,
Not wish the time were come,—
Of years the jubilee, of days
The Sabbath and the sum?

These years, what ages they have been!
This life, how long it seems!
And how can I, in evil days,
'Mid unknown hills and streams,
But sigh for those of home and heart,
And visit them in dreams?

Yet peace, my heart, and hush, my tongue;
Be calm, my troubled breast;
Each restless hour is hastening on
The everlasting rest:
Thou knowest that the time thy God
Appoints for thee is best.

Let faith, nor fear nor fretfulness,
Awake the cry, "How long?"
Let no faint-heartedness of soul
Damp thy aspiring song;
Right comes, truth dawns, the night departs
Of error and of wrong.

I remember Mr. Moody reading the words, "Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven," and saying, "Why did He so often lift up His eyes to heaven? I think He must have been homesick."[1]

There is a city, builded by no hand,
And unapproachable by sea or shore,
And unassailable by any band
Of storming soldiery for evermore.

[1] W. Robertson Nicoll, in *Memories of Dr. Horatius Bonar*, 104.

There we no longer shall divide our time
By acts or pleasures,—doing petty things
Of work, or warfare, merchandise or rhyme;
But we shall sit beside the silver springs

That flow from God's own footstool, and behold
Sages and martyrs, and those blessed few
Who loved us once and were beloved of old,
To dwell with them and walk with them anew,

In alternations of sublime repose,
Musical motion, the perpetual play
Of every faculty that heaven bestows
Through the bright, busy, and eternal day.[1]

[1] T. W. Parsons.

ABRAHAM.

II.

The Call.

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The Call.

Now the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. So Abram went, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.—Gen. xii. 1-4.

If doubt rests on the moving cause of the migration from Ur, none rests on that which prompted Abraham to leave Haran and journey towards Canaan. He did so in obedience to what he believed to be a Divine command, and in faith on what he understood to be a Divine promise.

1. In every crisis of history these two elements in their measure may be perceived, the one secular, the other religious; the one belonging merely to the past, the other reaching forward into the remotest future. In this instance, both are set distinctly before us in the Biblical narrative, side by side, as if in almost unconscious independence of each other. "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them [LXX. 'he led them'] from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten ['the slaves that they had bought'] in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."

¶ No one who sits at home can possibly realize what the great world-movements are. They must be seen, heard, and sensed.

To understand them we have to enter into their rhythmic action. It is not enough to read about them. All primitive national movements are symbolical. They symbolize a greater and vaster future, and every act has a special significance.[1]

2. This is the external aspect of the migration. A family, a tribe of the great Semitic race, moves westward from the cradle of its earliest civilization. There was nothing outwardly to distinguish them from those who had descended from the Caucasian range into the plains of the south in former times, or who would do so in times yet to come. There was, however, another aspect, which the surrounding tribes saw not, but which is the only point that we now see distinctly. "The Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Interpret these words as we will; give them a meaning more or less literal, more or less restricted; yet with what force do they break in upon the homeliness of the rest of the narrative; what an impulse do they disclose in the innermost heart of the movement; what a long vista do they open even to the very close of the history of which this was the first beginning!

I.

How did the Call come?

1. We are not informed of the manner in which Abraham became certain of the Divine will, hence it is idle to speculate about it. At all events, Abraham was absolutely certain that this was the will of God. When the Divine will is so diametrically opposed to our will as it must have been in this instance, it has to be very plainly expressed, or we certainly should not perceive it. For the best of us have a sad capacity for misbearing, for misunderstanding, what it does not suit us to understand.

[1] F. Grierson, *The Invincible Alliance* (1913), 16.

Accordingly, the first special revelation imparted to Abraham begins with a demand, and indeed with a very difficult one.

Only a God whom Abraham already knew, loved, and honoured could make such a demand. Hence the life of faith must have already existed, though how it originated is a secret. Terah, Abraham's father, was an idolater, his mother is not even mentioned. In Christian times there are thousands of instances in which their mothers have been the means of implanting faith in the hearts of the best. Under the ancient covenant it is only in exceptional cases that the mothers are of importance in the spiritual life of their children. It was Christ who first made the woman free. In short, the origin of that life of faith which we already find in Abraham is a complete secret to us, and such it is to-day also in each individual case. We receive, indeed, by means of our fellow-men, of books, of various providential circumstances, incitements, warnings, awakenings, shocks, attractions of all kinds. But every one who knows anything of the life of faith knows that the true birth of faith is a mysterious act, and that in it the grace of God and the will of man inseparably co-operate.

2. The first thing that is needful for us all, and it is imperatively needful, is to have the same feelings as this man, to have our hearts, whether we be young or old, so stirred and filled. We must have this vivid realization of God, and feel that He is bidding us arise and go out, and give up, if not the external form of our life, yet the old spirit of it, and seek a new life, if not different in the external circumstances of it, yet having a new spirit in it. How many of us have anything like this close, direct feeling about God, or have ever had it? Or if we have at moments had it, how soon it has gone and how dull it has become —this feeling about God that He is quite close to us, amidst all our friends and occupations; and that He is speaking to us, and that He is commanding us to renounce the life we have been leading hitherto, though it be the life of our kindred and our country—to deny it and give it up, in spite of all its charms of association and custom, and start on a new life altogether, with God alone walking by our side! Abraham was called upon actually to leave his country and his kindred. Such a complete break in his manner of life was, in his individual case, needful, in

order to break the spell of the fascinations of that life which he had hitherto led.

¶ Was it more easy for Abraham to believe, for him who was the first to exercise faith, than for us now, after so long a time, and after so many examples of faith? Perhaps God spake, in those days, in a way different from the way in which He speaks to us. But difficulties beset His way of speaking then, just as we have our difficulties now. God spake perhaps by a supernatural voice to Abraham; and we fancy that, if He would so speak to us, we should feel sure. But to Abraham's mind, perhaps, supernatural voices were not things very rare. There was nothing in this that, decidedly and without doubt, told him that it was God that spoke to him. Perhaps no account can be given of it but this: that when God does speak to a man, He speaks in such a way that the man knows assuredly that it is God that is speaking. God's voice, in whatever way it be heard—whether as what we call a supernatural sound from heaven, or as the suggestion of conscience, or as an indefinite conviction of duty, and an impulse which we can hardly explain—is self-evidencing. It approves itself to man as the voice of God. Abraham felt under a command as from God: he saw Him who was invisible. He had evidence, which he could not resist, of that place which he was to receive. And he obeyed to go out.[1]

3. One thing is certain: the writer did not, any more than the Oriental of the present day, imagine that God spoke to the outward ear. "God has spoken to me" is a common Arab phrase to-day when a man feels a deep impression on his soul. Even we use the term—a call from God, a warning from God—and many a man and woman on whom the power of a great idea falls has heard now, as Muhammad heard of old, the call of Abraham—"Get you forth from your father's house into another place," and, hearing, has obeyed.

¶ Whatever has any pith in it, any genuine life and force, is inspired and moved by hidden spiritual influences over which even the actor himself has but partial control. Take this expression—"the Lord said unto Abram." How? As a man would speak to a man? Audibly? What is this Divine voice to the sons of men? Suppose the answer should be, "the Lord came visibly before Abram, and spoke to him in plain Hebrew,"—what then? Many difficulties would arise at once, but no difficulties

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Called of God*, 66.

which faith could not overcome. Suppose the answer should be—"a spiritual revelation was made to Abram, no likeness was seen, no audible voice was heard, but his soul was made aware distinctly and certainly of the Divine purpose,"—what then? Substantially the result would be the same, and it is with results we have to deal rather than with processes. Mozart says in his letters that whenever he saw a grand mountain or a wonderful piece of scenery, it said to him—"turn me into music, play me on the organ"; and Mendelssohn says in his letters to his sister, "this is how I think of you to-day," or "this is what I have to say to you to-day," and then follows a bar or two of music which she is requested to play on the piano or the organ. So the mountain spoke to Mozart, and the organ spoke to Fanny Hensel, and why should we hesitate to say that the Lord spoke to Abram or that He is speaking to ourselves? He spoke to Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abram, Peter, Paul, John; has He ceased to speak unto the children of men? We now say that we have a notion, an impression, a conviction, or a feeling; and considering that our life is so shallow and cloudy, perhaps it is best to speak thus vaguely, but when we get right in soul we shall boldly say,—"the Lord calls me; the Lord tells me; the Lord sends me." It will be more filial, more tender, more Christian.[1]

II.

The Obedience of Faith.

1. The order to go out from Haran was unquestionably a hard one to obey. The reasons which had led his father to remove from Ur had ceased to operate. Room had been found, and quiet and pasture. The causes which might have suggested a division of the clan did not obtain in his case. He was a childless man, and had no need to seek fresh settlements for his descendants. He had property enough where he was for all his simple wants. He was not yet owner of such extensive flocks as to crowd his brother. The clan feeling was strong in his race; and to leave Haran meant to leave his father, now growing old, and his younger brother, in whose children lay the hope of the family, with everything that can make up home or country. To go anywhere, even to the most alluring territory, seemed in this instance a needless sacrifice of comfort. To travel without a purpose into a remote,

[1] J. Parker, *Adam, Noah, and Abraham*, 91.

unknown land beyond the desert; to leave home without knowing where to find a new one; to become a vagrant nomad, kithless and kinless;—this for a man without children, without ambition or lust of conquest, who had nothing to gain by emigrating, but everything to lose, seemed nothing short of folly.

No complaint is recorded to have been made by him, though every ancient and dear association was broken up. We read the story quietly, but a storm of human grief and struggle is hidden beneath its simple words. This is an example that calls to us across the centuries. For we are also called to be pilgrims of the invisible in the midst of the visible. We are bid to work and love in this world, but not to be content to belong to it alone. We dare not pitch our tent in the same place always, or linger too long in the pleasant valleys, for every year new labour calls us; and when all labour is done here, a new world beyond lies before us, where our destiny is to be finally accomplished, and the vaster part of our work to be done. We are bound to sacrifice ourselves; we must go forth in faith from our father's house, our kindred, from all we love, that is, from all the contentments of earth, to pursue the ineffable, to be perfect, to seek the city of God! Is that inhuman? No; for it is only thus—only in self-renunciation, only in pursuit of the perfect—that we make comfort, help, content for our fellow-men, and a home for their weary spirit.

2. Yet it is not the hardship involved in it that has made this emigration memorable. What was there in this movement that Psalmists and Prophets and Apostles should single it out for special emphasis? It was after all to the outward eye but a common caravan. Migration in Abraham's day was the rule, not the exception, of Eastern life, as it is still among the tribes of the desert. Hundreds of nomad sheikhs had done the same before, and hundreds would do the same after him. War, enterprise, restlessness, even hunger, has set and is setting numberless such caravans in motion. Yet no one remembers them; no one records them. They are as much a matter of course as the voyage of an emigrant vessel is a matter of course with ourselves.

Whence comes it, then, that in the ceaseless tide of humanity, thus rolling westward through the ages, this one caravan of a simple nomad Bedouin—this single drop in the mighty stream—

has fastened on itself the attention of men? How is it that in the history of our race this migration of Abraham has a higher interest than all the hordes that from time to time have swept over the face of the earth—the great armies of a Rameses, a Sennacherib, a Xerxes, a Genghis Khan, a Timur? The answer is contained in one word. It was his faith that singled him out in the counsels of God and has stamped him on the hearts of men. "By faith Abraham being called . . . obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went." "Abraham believed God." "Against hope" he "believed in hope." It was not ambition, not enterprise, not restlessness, not the lust of conquest, not the greed of gain, but the consciousness of a Divine presence, the submission to a Divine command, the trust in a Divine blessing, that drove him forth into unknown lands. He saw the hand of God beckoning him onward, which others could not see. He heard the voice of God calling him forward, which others could not hear. And so he left the home of his fathers; he detached himself from all the fond memories of the past and all the joyous associations of the present; he made the great venture of faith; he threw himself upon the blessing, threw himself upon the future, threw himself upon God.

¶ Faith is that act of prophetic anticipation which risks everything on a venture which nothing but the results can ever justify. Faith is that which lies shut up and asleep until the wakening touch of this incoming guest approaches, and stirs, and arouses; and then, at the first moment of the contact, does not so much think, or feel, as *will* that a future for itself should spring out of that momentary union. It wills in the power of some instinctive sympathy; it wills to trust itself to the fascination that draws it forward; it wills to rely upon the kinship that it assumes; it wills itself to be one with the arriving life. At the back of all the impressions of feeling, at the back of all the spontaneities of thought, lies the deep strength of energetic self-assertion which men all will; a self-assertion that presumes so far, not out of the blindness of pride, but out of the brave freedom of a childlike trust. It pushes out, it presses forward, it puts forth its force, because it is so true to the calls that summon it into action, because its innocent simplicity relies so readily on the genuineness and reality of all that it encounters. Such energy flows out into its wishes that it seems to compel their realization; so actively does it desire to know that it seems to enforce things to

conform to the conditions of its knowledge: they bend on the sway of its strong and effectual desires; it imposes upon them, as we say, its categories; and yet this imposition is, after all, nothing but its own natural and willing conformity to the conditions of that outward existence with which it so resolutely intends to unite itself, and so passionately believes itself to be akin.[1]

3. But what was the nature of Abraham's faith? His knowledge was still imperfect; we may believe that there still remained in him the belief that the gods of the surrounding nations had real existence, with large powers to help those who served them and to injure those who refused them service. But there was all the moral courage, audacity, faith in his high resolve to be loyal to the supreme God—the true God—to make no terms with the divinities which had usurped an authority to which they had no right—not to purchase their favour or avert their anger by offering any sacrifice or doing them any honour. And further, it is clear that if the shadows of common beliefs still fell upon him, and the gods of the nations still seemed to have a real though limited control over human affairs, his refusal to serve them implies a transcendant conception of the exclusive moral right of the Eternal to his obedience and trust.

But Abraham's faith includes very much more than a conviction of the supreme greatness and majesty of God, and His exclusive right to worship and obedience. Abraham's faith was a real religion, and religion includes other elements of immense importance. What does it include?

(1) It includes a deep, immovable belief in the august greatness and glory of the living and true God, in His perfection—His moral perfection—as well as in His wisdom, His power, and His eternal existence.

(2) It also includes a profound reverence and awe of God. The belief in His august greatness must be something more than belief. It must pass into emotion. The great and solemn aspects of the physical universe fill us with wonder and awe. God, who is supremely great in the moral universe, should also fill us with wonder and awe; and all that is fair and beautiful in His infinite life should inspire us with delight, as all that is fair and beautiful in earth and sky inspires us with delight.

[1] H. Scott Holland.

(3) Nor is this all. As yet we have only the beginnings of what can be really called religion. There are many who go no farther. God is a vision of glory to them, nothing more. When the vision comes they welcome it, as they welcome the chances of seeing a gorgeous sunset, or the immense and awful solitudes of the snow mountains. They are conscious that the vision of sublimity, greatness, beauty of a lofty kind, whether physical or moral, has an elevating power over thought and feeling, and increases at once the vigour and refinement of their own emotional and intellectual nature. True. But as yet we have nothing that can be called religion. We are in the region of æsthetics, and religion is something greater than this. Shall we add the expression of our emotions in adoration, in song? Yes, but the real worth of the expression must depend on what is expressed; and if the emotion is æsthetic only, not religious, the expression of it is æsthetic only, not religious. What more shall we add? In Abraham's case there was obedience to the Divine will—obedience of a very practical kind. He left the country where he had lived from his childhood, broke with the people of his own race, and went into another land and lived among strange people. He did not merely look to God to help him to fulfil his own ideas of right. He found in God a real Authority, an Authority not to be questioned—to be submitted to and unreservedly obeyed.

¶ God called and Abraham came. Here, as everywhere, faith shows itself as obedience. It is quite wrong to say faith *is* obedience. No; in its fundamental nature it is not obedience. It is not a manly, but a womanly quality; it is a perfect surrender to God; it is the reception into the heart of the love and the will of God. But faith always and everywhere, in things great and small, manifests itself under the appearance of obedience to God. Unless it does this, it is not what it calls itself.[1]

¶ There were occasions when Henry Varley's best friends, even his nearest and dearest, could not see the wisdom of what he felt divinely led to do, and when they thought the end he desired to achieve was capable of achievement in a discreeter, if less direct, way. So certain was he, however, that it was the Lord's will for him that he should do this and not that, and do it so and not otherwise, that to yield to their representations savoured to him of disloyalty to the Guiding Light and of disobedience to the

[1] Otto Funcke, *The World of Faith and the Everyday World*, 18.

Heavenly Vision. It was his simply to follow at all costs whithersoever they led. His mind was made up; his will was fixed. And, indeed, well was it for him that he was thus a man of such strong determination. No one can read his life-story without seeing that, from the day when, a mere child, he entered the crowded arena of London, onward through manhood to old age, he could never have done what he did, especially in his shining and successful service of the Gospel and the Kingdom of Christ, had his blood been without the iron of which it was full.[1]

¶ True is it that, in these days, man can do almost all things, only not obey. True likewise that whoso cannot obey cannot be free, still less bear rule; he that is the inferior of nothing, can be the superior of nothing, the equal of nothing. Nevertheless, believe not that man has lost his faculty of Reverence; that if it slumber in him, it has gone dead. Painful for man is that same rebellious Independence, when it has become inevitable; only in loving companionship with his fellows does he feel safe; only in reverently bowing down before the Higher does he feel himself exalted.[2]

(4) But is this all? Is there in religion nothing beyond the belief in God's greatness and perfection, reverence for Him, worship, the acknowledgment—the practical acknowledgment—of God's sovereignty by obedience? To Abraham God gave the great promise that in him and his seed all nations should be blessed. Abraham believed it, and we can well imagine that this mysterious, this immense blessing filled his thought, and that his life was lived very largely in the future which was to witness the fulfilment of the promise. And in all real religion there will be the hope and the expectation of receiving something from God.

We believe in the majesty and glory of God, and sometimes we are profoundly moved by our thoughts of His greatness—by what seems more than our own thoughts, by the actual apprehension and vision of His greatness. Yes, and similar emotion is produced by the mountains and the sea. But the mountains and the sea do not consciously and of purpose serve us; they are but wonderful visions. Between them and us there are no free mutual relations of affection and sympathy. They are remote, they belong to another order of being. And it is possible for us to be similarly and even more deeply impressed by the greatness

[1] *Henry Varley's Life-Story* (1913), 232. [2] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 173.

and glory of God, and for God to be still remote, for no friendly relations to exist between Him and us. But as soon as we discover that there are things which He will do for us—good things, great things—and we look to Him to do them, our whole relationship to God is changed; we have really a religion. Then we each stand related to Him as person to person. He is not merely a vision of wonder, glorious, fair, but remote. He is not merely an august authority, great, mighty, but remote, binding us by His laws, Himself remaining unbound. He too is bound to us as we are bound to Him. There are ties on both sides. We have a real religion; a religion that will be the support of righteousness and a perfect solace and joy.

¶ There are two great types of mind among men. One, which has a quick and clear receptiveness of spiritual influences and revelations, which readily responds to a message from the Divine, and bows to it in unquestioning obedience. The other, which hesitates, questions, doubts, criticizes. Both may be necessary in the growth of the human race to its full stature of manhood in Christ Jesus. But the former is immeasurably the nobler type of mind, and of incalculably the greater value to the human race. It needs the former type of mind to catch the highest influences and sublimest messages from God, and convey them to the masses of the people. Such men keep faith and hope alive; they make progress in religion, civilization, and freedom possible. The second type has a mission in checking extravagances in the religious life, in exposing tendencies to superstition and fanaticism, and vindicating the place of reason in all matters of human belief. The former type is by far the happier in experience and in influence. The task of the latter type is a difficult and often a thankless one, performed frequently with much suffering of mind and at a tremendous cost to the higher nature.[1]

III.

Hope.

1. Here then, as elsewhere, a clear hope sprang from faith. Recognizing God, Abraham knew that there was for men a great future. He looked forward to a time when all men should believe as he did, and in him all families of the earth be blessed. No

[1] W. J. Townsend.

doubt in these early days when all men were on the move and striving to make a name and place for themselves, an onward look might be common. But the far-reaching extent, the certainty, and the definiteness of Abraham's view of the future were unexampled. There far back in the hazy dawn he stood while the morning mists hid the horizon from every other eye, and he alone discerns what is to be.

¶ With regard to the country, it was represented to him somewhat vaguely as "a place," or, a little more clearly, as "a land"; and he probably conceived it as something not very unlike what he was leaving. It was at least a human life and abode; and though his imagination might rear a grand enough fabric of expectation, there was but one certainty in it—that whatever it should turn out, it was given by God, and God was in it.[1]

2. God's commands are not always accompanied by reasons, but always by promises, expressed or understood. To give reasons would excite discussion; but to give a promise shows that the reason, though hidden, is all-sufficient. We can understand the promise, though the reason might baffle and confuse us. The reason is intellectual, metaphysical, spiritual; but a promise is practical, positive, literal. As a shell encloses a kernel, so do the Divine commands hide promises in their heart. If this is the command: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"; this is the promise: "And thou shalt be saved." If this is the command: "Sell that thou hast and give to the poor"; this is the promise: "Thou shalt have treasure in heaven." If this is the command: "Leave father and mother, houses and lands"; this is the promise: "Thou shalt have an hundredfold here, and everlasting life beyond." If this is the command: "Be ye separate"; this is the promise: "I will receive you and be a Father unto you." So in this case: Though thou art childless, I will make of thee a great nation; thought hou art to be torn from thine own family, in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And each of those promises has been literally fulfilled.

¶ As soon as a man finds God, and consecrates his life to Him, his blessedness begins. God purposes the highest good of His servants in every task and trial to which He summons them. His calls are always upward to a better, richer, fuller life; and Divine

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Called of God*, 62.

promises come trooping in the footsteps of self-denial. God's commandments are not grievous, and His promises are exceedingly great and precious. "God calls no man to a life of self-denial for its own sake." If we only let His sweet, stern spirit have its way with us, we shall always find how gracious His will is. What looks like the rigour of law quickly turns out to be the tenderness of gospel. God's will has reference, first and last, to our best estate and most assured happiness, and for what He takes away, He never fails to give a superabundant recompense. He never requires us to do anything which it is not for our highest advantage to do. He so governs the world that sin is always loss, godliness is great gain.[1]

IV.

Election.

1. Under the simple statement, "The Lord said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy country," there are probably hidden years of questioning and meditation. God's revelation of Himself to Abraham did not, in all probability, take the determinate form of articulate command without having passed through many preliminary stages of surmise and doubt and mental conflict. But, once assured that God is calling him, Abraham responds quickly and resolutely. The revelation has come to a mind in which it will not be lost. As one of the few theologians who have paid attention to the method of revelation has said: "A Divine revelation does not dispense with a certain character and certain qualities of mind in the person who is the instrument of it. A man who throws off the chains of authority and association must be a man of extraordinary independence and strength of mind, although he does so in obedience to a Divine revelation; because no miracle, no sign or wonder which accompanies a revelation can by its simple stroke force human nature from the innate hold of custom and the adhesion to and fear of established opinion; can enable it to confront the frowns of men, and take up truth opposed to general prejudice, except there is in the man himself, who is the recipient of the revelation, a certain strength of mind and independence which concurs with the Divine intention."

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 25.

¶ Everywhere we find beings and things more loftily endowed than others of the same kind. This is markedly evident in the religious sphere. And there is at first a jarring wonder at the apparent inequality of the Divine arrangements; until we understand that the superior endowment of the few is intended to enable them the better to help and bless the rest. "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing." A great thinker feels that his end is approaching; he has made grand discoveries, but he has not as yet given them to the world. He selects one of his most promising pupils, and carefully indoctrinates him with his system; he is very severe on any inaccuracies and mistakes; he is very careful to give line on line. Why does he take all this care? For the sake of the young man? Not exclusively for the pupil's benefit; but that he may be able to give to the world those thoughts which his dying master has confided to his care. The young disciple is blessed that he may pass the blessings on to others. Is not this a glimpse into the intention of God, in selecting Abraham, and in him the whole family of Israel? It was not so much with a view to their personal salvation, though that was included, as that they might pass on the holy teachings and oracles with which they were entrusted. It would have been worse than useless to have given such jewels directly to mankind. As well put a gorgeous banquet before a hungry babe. To say the least, there was no language ready in which to enshrine the sacred thoughts of God. The genius of truth required that the minds of men should be prepared to apprehend its sacred lessons. It was needful that definitions and methods of expression should be first well learnt by the people, who, when they had learnt them, might become the teachers of mankind.[1]

2. Kuenen, who questions the historical existence of the patriarchs, explicitly rejects the idea of a Divine election to which their faith was a response. "Is," he asks, "the belief in Israel's selection still tenable in our days? That the first Christians—who knew but a small portion of the inhabited world and could hope that within a comparatively short time the true religion would have reached that world's uttermost bounds—should have acquiesced in this view is most natural. But we? Is this belief in harmony with the experience which we have now accumulated for centuries together, and with our present knowledge of lands and nations? We do not hesitate to reply in the negative." Now the Old Testament, it need scarcely be said,

[1] F. B. Meyer.

assumes precisely the contrary state of things to be the fact. The principle of election is obviously conceived to be a primary element in the Divine method, and accordingly the whole story of Genesis describes the response made to God's action by successive individuals—men in whom had been awakened a certain susceptibility to the Divine self-revelation. There were "holy prophets"—that is, men of spiritual genius—"since the world began." The religion which was to embrace mankind could find an entrance only through some solitary soul, quick to apprehend and to welcome the promises of God. This is tantamount to saying that the progress of the race in religion, as in other things, has depended upon individuals; and even if it could be shown that the name of Abraham is merely a mythical abstraction, or a tribal personification, it would yet be reasonable and indeed necessary to assume that at a certain point in history an individual man appeared, capable of so entering into communion with God as to be the true father of the faithful.

¶ The only adequate explanation of the rise and growth of Hebrew religion is the supposition that God actually made known His will to some individual human spirit, and manifested Himself to him singly and alone. Abraham's history, says Dean Church, "is marked as a history of a man, a soul by itself in relation to Almighty God; not as one of a company, a favoured brotherhood, or chosen body, but in all his doings single and alone, alone with the Alone, one with One, with his Maker as he was born and as he dies, alone; the individual soul, standing all by itself, in the presence of its Author and Sustainer, called by Him and answering to His call, choosing, acting, obeying, from the last depths and secrets of its being."[1]

3. Let us also consider the marvellous combination of Divine initiative and human freedom in this call, which set apart a family, in which starts, at first with imperceptible steps, the journey of humanity on the path of free salvation. From the first moment of their intercourse God does nothing without man, and man can do nothing without God. If God had not called Abraham, the Elohistic cult of the children of Terah would have shared the common fate and would have been swallowed up in the polytheism of universal idolatry. It is therefore really by

[1] R. L. Ottley, *Aspects of the Old Testament*, 118.

a miraculous intervention of the Creator that religion was restored to man. And the selection of Abraham was purely an act of grace. On the other hand, if the free experience of humanity under the guidance of Providence had not led man to recover by his own efforts the idea of God, to wish for God, and to build the altar of God, the Creator could not without infringing human liberty, destroying His own work and contradicting Himself, have called Abraham and said to him: "Here am I, I will be thy God." "I will be *thy* God," He said, as He offered Himself as a guide across the unknown lands where He invited Abraham to journey.

¶ How did it come to pass that Abraham achieved such unique greatness? He was elect of God—partly, no doubt, because of the wonderful depth and power of his own faith; a faith which indeed had its vicissitudes of weakness and strength, but which, though now and then it yielded, bore through a long life a constant and severe strain, became stronger as he grew older, and met sublimely the supreme test of all when he was required to sacrifice his son. But the power of his own faith is not the only explanation. There was that in him which made it certain that he would "command his children and his household after him" "that they might keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment."[1]

¶ In an autobiographical Note, written more than half a century after the event of taking Orders—which he justly describes as a turning-point in his life—Cardinal Manning recounts the motives which induced him in the year 1832 to resign his post in the Colonial Office and become a clergyman in the Church of England:—

"At this time I came to know a Harry Blunt of Chelsea, and found him not only earnest but highly intelligent. He had been, I think, twelfth or fourteenth wrangler. All this made a new thought spring up in me—not to be a clergyman in the sense of my old destiny, but to give up the world and to live for God, and for souls. This grew on me daily. I had been long praying much, and going habitually to churches. It was a turning-point in my life. I wrote and asked Harry Blunt to come and see me at the Colonial Office. He did so: and, after a long weighing of the case, I resolved to resign, and to give myself to the service of God, and of souls. My doubt was whether God had called me; and I had a great fear of going uncalled. It was as purely a call

[1] R. W. Dale.

from God as all that He has given me since. It was a call *ad veritatem et ad seipsum.* As such I tested it, and followed it."[1]

V.

Separation.

The call of Abraham was a call to separate himself. Perhaps election always involves separation. Not outwardly always. In the case of Abraham the outward separation was necessary from his position and circumstances. He was to be the father of the faithful. Faith was new in his time; and its nature had to be taught by a visible representation: and he was called upon to enact the life of faith upon a public stage. But to us now, upon whom the ends of the world are come, when faith has been so long in the world, and when the Son of God, the Author and the Finisher of the faith, has lived His life upon the earth—to us, such sudden breaks, entailing a change in one's outward life, are less needful. And they are contrary to the intention of Christianity, which desires that faith should be so strong as to maintain a life altogether different from the world's life, even under the same outward forms of life with the world. What the religion of Christ desires of us is, not that we should alter the outward form of our life, but that we should infuse a new spirit into it, even the spirit of Christ. It is not that we should renounce the business, or occupation, or profession, formerly ours; but that we should carry it on henceforth, realizing it to be a way in which God is with us, by which He is leading us, through which He will bring us to a promised heritage at the last.

¶ Yet it is a remarkable fact that throughout the history of the world, when a distinct call has come to a man, it has often involved separation. When Abraham was called he "went out." When St. Paul was called by God's grace and appointed apostle to the uncircumcision, he was compelled to separate himself from the religious community of his fellow-countrymen. When Luther was called to lead a sorely-needed Reformation of religion, he had to separate himself from the Church of his fathers. And when Chalmers heard his call to vindicate the Spiritual Headship of the

[1] E. S. Purcell, *Life of Cardinal Manning*, i. 93.

Lord Jesus Christ over His Church, he had to leave the Church he loved.

¶ But the separation may be, not from country or Church, but from one's own past life or prevalent worldliness. It was as a call to separation that the word of God came to Dr. Augustus Hopkins Strong, who afterwards became President of Rochester Theological Seminary. He says: "I had begun to read my Bible, and one afternoon, several weeks after I went back to college, I was reading by lamplight a chapter in Corinthians, where were these words: 'Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' 'Oh,' said I, 'I never read that before; I have come out from among them; I *have* tried to be separate; I will not touch the unclean thing. Now, I have the word and promise of God that He will be a Father to me.' Then for the first time in all my life I felt there was a tie between me and God. I looked out through the branches of the elm trees and saw the stars shining in the sky, and I said to myself: 'When those stars grow old and die, God will be my Father and my Friend.'"[1]

[1] A. H. Strong, *One Hundred Chapel-Talks* (1913), 17.

ABRAHAM.

III.

CANAAN.

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Canaan.

And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.—Gen. xii. 5.

I.

The Route.

1. The route by which Abraham and his train were led into the promised land cannot be clearly ascertained. Dr. Malan argues for a line from Haran to Thapsacus, the Biblical Tiphsakh, some forty-five miles below Balis, where the Euphrates changes its course from south to south-east, and where there is a very celebrated ford westward of the junction of the Belîkh with the Euphrates. If this was Abraham's track he would have descended the fertile country down the course of the Belîkh, have crossed the desert to the oasis of Tadmor, and thence probably to Damascus. But if he had flocks of sheep, it does not seem likely that he would have crossed the desert; and the easier travelling, and the traditions, make it more probable that this was not his route, nor the way by the ferry of Bîr. The discovery of the true Carchemish at the modern Jerabolus, about seventeen miles south of Bîr, and on a much more fertile tract of travel, and a straighter line towards Canaan, makes it most likely that this was Abraham's way across the Euphrates.

¶ Standing not very long ago on the top of the vast mound of Carchemish, overhanging a bend of the Euphrates, I could detect on the south-eastern horizon the outline of the vast and rich plains of Haran, and while there I saw a party of Bedouins cross the river. Even so high up the Euphrates is a mighty river, and I know of no spot further down its course where its turbid and

eddying waters can be crossed as at Carchemish, which completely commands the passage. The Arabs crossed from the other side in a primitive style. Their goats, asses, and cows were tied together in single file. The leader mounted on an inflated hide on which he paddled himself, with the line of animals attached, down stream, till, taking advantage of the bend, he landed his convoy about a mile down the river on my side (the west). Other files followed, with women sitting astride behind them, or children bound round their shoulders. I went to meet them, and, enquiring whence they were, was told that they had come away from Haran in quest of fresh pasturage.[1]

2. Following still the great route, Abraham would pass on with the grand range of Anti-Lebanon rising to his westward side, until he descended into the lovely plain of Damascus.

Damascus lies about seventy miles from the seaboard, upon the east of Anti-Lebanon, and close to the foot of the hills. It is an astonishing site for what is said to be the oldest, and is certainly the most enduring, city of the world. For it is utterly incapable of defence; it is remote from the sea and the great natural lines of commerce. From the coast of Syria it is doubly barred by those ranges of snow-capped mountains whose populations enjoy more tempting prospects to the north and west. But look east and you understand Damascus. You would as soon think of questioning the site of New York or of Sydney or of San Francisco. Damascus is a great harbour of refuge upon the earliest sea man ever learned to navigate. It is because there is nothing but desert beyond, or immediately behind this site; because the Abana, instead of wasting her waters on a slight extension of the fringe of fertile Syria, saves them in her narrow gorge till she can fling them well out upon the desert, and there, instead of slowly expending them on the doubtful possibilities of a province, lavishes all her life at once in the creation of a single great city, and straightway dies in face of the desert—it is because of all this that Damascus, so remote and so defenceless, has endured throughout human history, and must endure.[2]

3. Leaving the immediate neighbourhood of the beautiful and well-watered city, and with his patriarchal caravan under

[1] H. B. Tristram, in *Church Congress Report* [Carlisle], 1884, p. 242.
[2] G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 642.

experienced eyes, and doubtless with due precautions in the disposal of his trained servants against a sudden attack, Abraham would slowly traverse the broad rich land lying for leagues around Damascus, crossing the Pharpar stream in its slow meandering course, and in due time ascending the stony uplands to the high levels of Bashan, the region which was to receive its name from Jetur the son of Ishmael. These rugged highlands and far-extended downs sloping away eastward to the desert were even then held by fierce and strong marauders, the Rephaim, whose chief seat of rule and sanctuary of idolatrous worship was at Ashtaroth Karnaim, or Ishtar of the two horns, that is, of the crescent moon,

> The mooned Ashtaroth,
> Heaven's queen and mother both;

these, with the Zuzim in Ham, and the Emim in the plain of Kiriathaim, and the more southern Khorites in their mount Se'ir, had lately been reduced to subjection by Chedorlaomer.

In this romantic and beautiful region, shaggy in its western glens with the abundant growth of oak and ilex, and with park-like glades of rich herbage and lovely flowers, "where wood-pigeons rose in clouds from the oaks, and jays and wood-peckers screamed in every glade," a land where the open pastures are unrivalled in their depth of herbage, and the vines, now so long untended, still bear their clusters among the ruins, it was Abraham's lot to "ride upon the high places of the earth," so swept by cool and healthy breezes, so watered by the dews of heaven and by springs and rills of the earth, that all things must have tempted him to linger on his way.[1]

¶ Dr. Tristram gives a delightful account of this part of Bashan: Though, when viewed from an eminence, the whole country seems a boundless elevated plain, covered with forest, it was by no means over a plateau that we had to ride. Rising, as the country does, suddenly from the deep valley of the Jordan, it is naturally, along its whole western border, deeply furrowed by many streams which drain the district; and our ride was up and down deep concealed glens, which we only perceived when on their brink, and mounting from which, on the other side, a short canter soon brought us to the edge of the next. The country was surpassingly beautiful in its verdant richness and variety. We

[1] H. G. Tomkins, *Abraham and His Age*, 84.

first descended the ravine of a little streamlet, which soon grew to a respectable size, its banks clothed with sparse oaks and rich herbage. The cheery call of the cuckoo and the hoopoe greeted us for the first time this spring, and resounded from side to side. Then our track meandered along the banks of a brook, with a dense fringe of oleanders, "willows by the water-courses" shading it from the sun, and preventing summer evaporation, while they wasted their perfume on the desert air, without a human inhabitant near. Lovely knolls and dells, in their brightest robes of spring, opened out at every turn, gently rising to the wooded plateau above. Then we rose to the higher ground, and cantered through a noble forest of oaks. Perhaps we were in the woods of Mahanaim.[1]

4. From some commanding height, Abraham must have gained his first thrilling sight of the promised land, and looked down on the sweet blue waters of Gennesaret. "It is said," writes Dean Stanley, "by those who have visited those parts, that one remarkable effect produced, is the changed aspect of the hills of Judah and Ephraim. Their monotonous character is lost, and the range when seen as a whole is in the highest degree diversified and impressive. And the wide openings in the western hills, as they ascend from the Jordan-valley, give such extensive glimpses into the heart of the country, that not merely the general range, but particular localities can be discerned with ease."

¶ The same view is thus described by the Rev. A. E. Northey: "We could clearly discern the north end of the Dead Sea as well as part of the Sea of Galilee, with the whole extent of the Jordan valley, the river gleaming here and there at its windings. In front of us, a little south of west, were Ebal and Gerizim, and directly opposite to us we could distinguish Mount Tabor, with the ridge of Carmel stretching into the far distance, and the wide plain of Esdraelon, narrowing into the Wady Farrah which debouches on the Ghor. Farther north we could see Jebel Safed behind the Sea of Galilee, and far away in the blue haze we were gladdened at last by the sight of the snow-sprinkled peaks of Hermon. It was a glorious panorama, embracing many points of interest, and withal most lovely in itself. Immediately in front were fine forests of oak covering the rounded hills that trend down westwards towards the Ghor. Behind us lay the undulating heights of Gilead, the valleys of Kefrenjy and Zerka making wide landmarks."

[1] H. B. Tristram, *The Land of Israel*, 462.

5. The last descent would bring the long train down into the "fine wide valley" of the Jabbok (now the Zerka), "a rapid stream only to be waded at certain spots," fringed with oleanders and other shrubs, and with "beautiful level meadows" on its banks; and then into the deep green valley of the Jordan, where they must have passed the waters of the rushing river probably at the ford of Damieh, "just below the junction of the Zerka and Jordan." Once across the stream, Abraham stood at length on "the land that Jehovah would shew him."

II.

The Land.

1. According to Gen. x. 6, Canaan, into whose country Abraham journeyed with the object of settling, was the descendant of Cush, and the inhabitants ought therefore to have spoken a Hamitic language. Historically, however, this cannot be proved, but it is certain that if the Canaanites spoke a Hamitic language, they soon changed it for the speech which they seem to have used as far back as history can go, this speech being closely akin to Hebrew. In fact, there is very little doubt that Abraham and his descendants, forsaking their mother-tongue, the language of Babylonia, adopted the dialect of the Canaanitish language which they afterwards spoke, and which is so well known at the present day as Hebrew. To all appearance Abraham's relatives who remained in Mesopotamia, in "the city of Nahor," spoke a dialect of Aramaic, a language with which Abraham himself must have been acquainted, and which may have been spoken in Babylonia at that early date, as it certainly was, together with Chaldæan, later on.

2. It is noteworthy that the country to which Abraham migrated, and which is called by the Hebrew writers Canaan, is called by the same name in the Tell el-Amarna letters, and the fact that the Babylonian king Burra-Buriaš uses the same term shows that it was the usual name in that part of the world. Among the Babylonians, however, it was called *mât Amurrî*, "the land of Amoria," the common expression, among the Babylonians and the Assyrians, for "the West." In

later times the Assyrians designated this district *mât Ḫatti*, "the land of Heth," the home of the Hittites. The inference from this naturally is that, at the time when the Babylonians became acquainted with the country, the Amorites were the most powerful nationality there, whilst the Hittites had the dominion, and were in greater force later on, when the Assyrians first traded or warred there. These two linguistic usages show that the two great races in the country, both of them Hamitic according to Gen. x. 15, 16, were the Amorites (who spread as far as Babylonia, and even had settlements there), and the Hittites, known from other sources to have extended their empire far into the north among the Cappadocians, and south as far as Carchemish and Hamath.[1]

3. Every thoughtful student of Bible history will recognize, in the geographical position of Palestine, certain conditions which eminently fitted it for the purpose to which God destined it. Not by accident did that strip of Syrian territory become the theatre of sacred events, the home of the covenant people, and the seat of Divine revelation. There was no other region on the earth's surface which could have answered so well.

(1) The first feature which eminently marked out the land for the residence of God's chosen nation is this: it unites, as no other does, the two indispensable conditions of central position and yet of isolation. To lie in the midst of the nations, at the focus and gathering-place of those mighty and cultured empires whose rivalries ruled the politics, as their example led the civilization, of antiquity, yet at the same time to be shut off from such contact with them as must of necessity prove injurious, seemed to be opposite requirements, very hard to be reconciled in the land of promise. It lies at a corner where Asia, Africa, and Europe meet, or all but touch. The six ancient states of Babylon, Assyria, Media, Persia, Phœnicia, and Egypt stood round about it. The main lines of ancient traffic ran close past its border. Whenever, for purposes of war or trade, bodies of men sought to pass from the populous and powerful states of the north, whose centre lay along the Euphrates, to the populous and powerful states of the south, whose centre lay along the Nile, there was only one road

[1] T. G. Pinches.

by which they could travel. "Syria," says a famous modern geographer, "is bounded by a great sea of sand on the east, as by a great sea of water on the west. Across that natural barrier of sea and sand, there is but one convenient highway." Palestine is like "a bridge arching across a double sea of desert sands and of waters which the want of harbours made useless to it. It connected the Euphrates with the Nile." While thus set in the middle of all lands, it stood strangely apart from all. "No great highway," says the same authority, "led through it from nation to nation; all went by it, over the roads which skirted it without traversing it; and which all found their type in the sea-line which ran from the harbours of the ancient Phœnician cities to Egypt, along a shore which was almost devoid of havens." In fact, it was so isolated that, if its people chose, they could dwell apart. On the west, a harbourless coast; on the north, great mountain ranges; on the east and south, vast waterless wastes; yet alongside it, and close by its very borders, there must pass, by fatiguing and hazardous journeys, the long caravans or laden ships which carried traffic from one civilized state to another, and the cumbrous armies by which rival empires sought to crush each other. Geographically, politically, commercially, no country is so situated in relation to three great continents and five great bodies of water; none unites such amazing contrasts,—perfect isolation and independence, with the ability to go out from this isolation and establish relations with all the greatest nations of antiquity.

(2) Another characteristic which qualified Palestine to be a training-ground for the Hebrews was this, that it combined to an unusual degree high agricultural fertility with exposure to sudden and severe disasters. In most years, it could sustain a dense population of cultivators, supposing them to be industrious and frugal, without any excessive or grinding toil. Enough, not always for export, but for home consumption at least, its well-watered valleys and vine-clad hills could furnish in ordinary seasons. For comfortable sustenance, therefore, though not for wealth or luxury, such a nation of peasants was sufficiently provided within its own borders. It could dwell apart, yet experience no want. At the same time, the people were kept in close dependence for the fruits of harvest upon the bounty of Providence. Their proximity to a desert on one side exposed the land

to calamities of various kinds. A deficient rainfall, or the prevalence of hot winds from the south and east, might entail a total failure of the crops. Flights of locusts might strip the fields bare before they were reaped, or predatory bands of Bedouins pillage the granaries of the peasantry under the eyes of a feeble government. The land lay along an ancient axis of volcanic action, and has been, within the historic period, visited again and again by earthquakes. To this day these are still the occasional plagues of Southern Syria; and so long as it was peopled by a race whose national annals constituted one long providential discipline, all such forms of disaster, like arrows in the Almighty's quiver, lay ready to be employed for the chastisement of His wayward and indocile people.

(3) To these advantages for its special design, this perhaps ought to be added, that hardly any regions offer so few temptations to corrupt the simplicity of their inhabitants or better facilities for the defence of their liberties. Destitute of good harbours (for Tyre was always in foreign hands) or of a navigable river, Palestine never could have become an important mercantile power. The attempts which were made with this view, under its most prosperous sovereign, depended, for any success they enjoyed, upon its foreign conquests on the shores of the Red Sea; and they had no permanent success. Western Palestine always has been, and always must be, a land of agriculturists on a small scale, especially of vine-dressers and oil-growers. But for a hardy race of peasants, leading a simple life from father to son, and congregated in small village communities, it formed a safe and easily defended home. In the caves with which its limestone hills are honeycombed, and in the rocky fastnesses which command the passes leading from the flat border on all sides up into the heart of the land, a small, brave people could hold their own against superior force, and by guerilla warfare could wear out, as its patriotic sons more than once proved, the efforts of trained armies.

When all these considerations are combined, it may be fairly said that the selection of Canaan to be the future heritage of Abraham's seed was not a result of caprice or accident, but the carrying out of a plan which was foreseen by the Divine wisdom when God laid the foundations of its hills and scooped out its fertile water-courses.

¶ Canaan, says Lange, unites within itself a rich variety of most significant contrasts, by the blending of which is formed that unity, the Chosen Land, which was destined to be the place of education for the chosen people. In its eastern highlands it exhibits the Asiatic characteristic of mountain vastness; in its western formation of hills and valleys are seen touches of its affinity to Europe; towards the south are reflected Egypt and Africa, in the glaring contrasts it presents of both paradisaic and terrible scenes; towards the north the mountainous district of Lebanon forms the boundary of the land, the white peak of Hermon, seen far through the country, represents the region of eternal winter; while in the low-lying tracts of the valley of Jordan the palm, the pride of tropical regions, revels in the hot climate of Arabia. How extensive is the scale of climatic contrasts in the land! And what a happy medium in those warm boundaries of the temperate zone, in which it is easier for man to maintain the due proportion between labour and rest, in which, in the pleasant contrast of their alternative, both light and darkness could be called gifts of God, and looked upon as welcome blessings!

With the pleasant occupations of rural life between seed-time and harvest was interspersed the romantic feature of nomadic life, and the anchorite's freedom from care for supplies was experienced within the sphere of pastoral life; while the domestic comforts of the western life were here met with, on the very boundaries of the desert and of the torrid zone. The Israelite could often pass both night and day in the open air, but not without experiencing the excitement which man always feels in the romantic wilderness of the earth. He was surrounded by the kindly sights and sounds of Nature; but the sublime was everywhere the predominant element. His country was rich in enjoyments, but exposed to the vicissitudes of great natural catastrophes. The sharp contrast between oasis and desert, between the soil of the aromatic and variegated palm and the naked briny, sandy rock of Arabia, is found here—*e.g.* in the contrast between the frightful rocky wilderness of Quarantania and the blooming gardens of Jericho, and especially between the fertile borders of the Lake of Galilee and the desert shores of the Dead Sea. These contrasts point to the delicate and spiritual nature of the country, to its delicate suspension on the line between the blessing and the curse. It lies midway between those great natural extremes, in which the earth seems almost to overpower man, as, *e.g.*, in the heat and luxuriance of the East Indies and the frozen desert of Greenland.

4. We have now to ascertain from the sources accessible to us the conditions of the land in which Abraham found a new home. That he was not viewed by the inhabitants of Palestine as a stranger is evident from his friendly relations with the leading men of the country. There are introduced by name three Amorite chiefs, Mamre, and his brothers Eshcol and Aner, whose friendly offices were placed at the disposal of Abraham in his conflict with Chedorlaomer. From what Sayce and Hommel have told us about the Arabian origin of the Babylonian dynasty, it may be assumed that Abraham was even racially allied to the Amorite chiefs in S. Palestine. In Gen. xiv. 7 the Amorites are further spoken of as in Hazazon-tamar, on the western shore of the Dead Sea. It is clearly established that in the time of Abraham, in S. Palestine, particularly about Hebron, Amorites formed the main stock of the population. Abraham thus took up his residence in the midst of the racially allied Amorite population of S. Palestine, and, as an immigrant from the district on the Great River, he may readily have been called by the Canaanites Abram ha-'Ibrî. We know the significance which the Euphrates as a boundary between Mesopotamia and Syria still possessed in the Achæmenid period, giving rise to the designation of Syria as the land "beyond the river" (Ezra iv. 20, vi. 13). There are also indications which justify the conclusion that, although to a limited extent, there was an affinity between the cultus practised by Abraham and that of the S. Palestinian Amorites. Foremost among these is the venerable form of Melchizedek, the priest-king of (Uru-)Salim, where El Elyôn was worshipped in a fashion approximating to monotheism.

¶ The language which we call Hebrew is the language of the glosses to the Tell el-Amarna letters, and Isa. xix. 18 calls it "the language of Canaan." It differs little from the dialect spoken by the Phœnicians. The place-names of the Israelites were nearly all derived from the earlier inhabitants, and many of them are found in the Egyptian inscriptions and in the Tell el-Amarna letters.[1]

¶ The modern peasantry of the country closely resemble the ancient Canaanites in physical character, to judge from the remains of the latter that excavation has revealed; indeed, in all probability the substratum of the population has remained un-

[1] L. B. Paton, in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, iii. 177.

changed in racial affinities throughout the vicissitudes that the country has suffered.[1]

III.

Down into Egypt.

1. Abraham's first experience in the land of promise was of famine. He had to look on his herd melting away, his favourite cattle losing their appearance, his servants murmuring and obliged to scatter. In his dreams he must, night after night, have seen the old country, the green breadth of the land that Euphrates watered, the heavy-headed corn bending before the warm airs of his native land; but morning by morning he wakes to the same anxieties, to the sad reality of parched and burnt-up pastures, shepherds hanging about with gloomy looks, his own heart distressed and failing. He was also a stranger here who could not look for the help an old resident might have counted on. It was probably years since God had made any sign to him. Was the promised land worth having after all? Might he not be better off among his old friends in Haran? Should he not brave their ridicule and return? He will not so much as make it possible to return. He will not even for temporary relief go north towards his old country, but will go to Egypt, where he cannot stay, and from which he must return to Canaan.

2. The extraordinary country to which Abraham betook himself, and which was destined to exercise so profound an influence on his descendants, had even at this early date attained a high degree of civilization. The origin of this civilization is shrouded in obscurity, as the source of the great river to which the country owes its prosperity for many centuries kept the secret of its birth. As yet scholars are unable to tell us with certainty what Pharaoh was on the throne when Abraham went down into Egypt. The monuments have preserved the effigies of two distinct types of rulers; the one simple, kindly, sensible, stately, handsome, fearless, as of men long accustomed to the throne. These are the faces of the native Egyptian rulers. The other type of face is heavy and massive, proud and strong but full of care, with neither

[1] R. A. S. Macalister, in Hastings' *Single-volume Dictionary of the Bible*, 673.

the handsome features nor the look of kindliness and culture which belong to the other. These are the faces of the famous Shepherd kings who held Egypt in subjection, probably at the very time when Abraham was in the land.

3. It was a strange change for the patriarch, and a strange episode is bound up with it. The story brings him from his quiet pastoral life into the midst of the vastest and most citied civilization of the world of that time, from the greatest simplicity to the greatest splendour. When he saw the mighty temples and palaces, and the sacred river rolling by pyramids and towns, vast reservoirs and multitudinous gardens, he thought of his tent on the rock of Bethel, and we can well imagine that a grave sense of awe fell upon him—not fear, but such solemn thought as enters into a great soul when, after years of lonely life, it is brought into touch with an overwhelming crowd of humanity in a vast city.

Such a shock would shake the whole of Abraham's life into a new solution. In the multitude of questions, Abraham might well lose for a time that steady faith in a Divine leader of his life on which the writer of the narrative insists. If that were so, the episode of his conduct with regard to his wife would be natural enough at this place in the story. It is the act of a man off his balance. He feared, we are told, that when the king saw how lovely Sarah was, he himself should be slain that the king might possess her. Therefore, as Sarah was his half-sister, he persuaded her to be false under the semblance of truth. "Say, I pray thee, that thou art my sister."

(1) Fear and falsehood for the sake of life are very common and very human; but we should have expected better things from Abraham. Not even the standard of the age can excuse this lie, or palliate its shame. It sinned against that very standard. It was a violation of Arab honour. And the king of Egypt, when he found it out, blamed Abraham for not having been true to his traditionary gentlehood. And indeed it was a bad business. A frank falsehood which places the liar in danger, which runs the whole risk of the lie, has an element of daring in it which modifies our blame of it; but the baseness of saying one thing as truth and meaning another which is not truth, of being true in the word and false in the thought, of lying and not

taking the risk of the lie—that was the wrong of Abraham, and he knew it to be wrong.

We condemn him; but have we never coasted by his falsehood, never been wrecked on it ourselves? Have we never, through fear of ill to life or position, answered some question in words which, though true generally, were untrue to the particular point of inquiry? In business, in politics, in society, in journalism, or in money matters, how often have we told half the truth, keeping back that part which would damage ourselves, salving our conscience, as Abraham did, by weighing the half truth against the hidden lie? At every point this is a shameful thing; it is a double falsehood. There is not only the deceit that entraps the world into belief in us, but also the self-craft which, honeying over the devil himself, pretends to our own consciences that we have not told a lie. And in the end there is no kind of lie that does more harm to men than this. It is the very lie of those false directors and false companies that have all over the business-world murdered the poor.

For I remember a quarrel I had with your father, my dear,
All for a slanderous story, that cost me many a tear.
I mean your grandfather, Annie: it cost me a world of woe,
Seventy years ago, my darling, seventy years ago.

For Jenny, my cousin, had come to the place, and I knew right well
That Jenny had tript in her time: I knew, but I would not tell.
And she to be coming and slandering me, the base little liar!
But the tongue is a fire as you know, my dear, the tongue is a fire.

And the parson made it his text that week, and he said likewise,
That a lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies,
That a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.[1]

(2) Abraham did not risk his own life, but he risked his wife's honour. The story makes the Pharaoh reproach him with that

[1] Tennyson, *The Grandmother.*

shame. There is self-sacrifice in the lie told to save another's life. The friend who takes on him a guilt not his own, for the sake of his friend; the mother who accuses herself of treason to save her son—these suffer some inward penalty, for Truth exacts her sanctions; but the falsehood is so mixed with nobility that it loses its power to hurt mankind. But to involve a woman in possible dishonour, to risk a great wrong to true love—and all for the sake of one's own life—that was a marvellous baseness to introduce into so mighty and venerable a character as Abraham's; and it warns us, who are weaker than he, to watch our characters with care, lest, lured by fear of pain or death, we bring, by lying, reproach upon another. Such injury done to another is robbery. It is sometimes almost a form of murder.

¶ On one occasion a liar with whom I lived on intimate terms made me think that my last book had been a failure. For five years I believed it, suffered under the belief, and lost my courage. On my return to Sweden I found that the book had had a great success. Five years had been struck out of my life; I was nearly losing self-respect and the courage to support existence. That is equivalent to murder. And this behaviour on the part of my only friend, for whom I had worked and made sacrifices, gave me such a shock that all my ideas were confused. It took me years to rearrange them and bring them into proper order. True and false were mingled together: lies became reality, and my whole life seemed as unsubstantial as smoke. I was not far from ruin and the loss of reason.[1]

(3) There is yet another interest in the tale applicable to our spiritual life. No man who had perfect faith in a Divine Friend would have taken refuge in a safety of this kind. Is it not curious that Abraham (whose highest quality the story makes to be faith in God) should be made to fail, especially in that grace? It seems so, but only seems. Such a special failure is quite in accord with experience. Moses, meekest of men, is betrayed into ungovernable passion. Peter, the soldier-heart, betrays for fear his Master's love. Elijah, iron in perseverance and in fortitude, sinks into unmanly despair of life. It happens only once, it is true, but it happens terribly.

¶ A man can rarely remain unconscious of his special excellence. At last he grows so secure of not failing on this

[1] A. Strindberg, *Zones of the Spirit*, 161.

side of his nature that he leaves it to take care of itself. And then, all of a moment, his fortress is taken. The story of the taking of the Castle of Edinburgh has a thousand analogies. The defenders thought it safe where the steep precipice made its strength. All the weak portions of the walls were watched; this was not. Then, one dark night, in storm and driving rain, a band of daring men crept slowly up the angry cliff, and the impossible became a fact. The castle was seized by the foe.[1]

4. In going down into Egypt it does not appear that Abraham received any Divine direction. He acted simply on his own judgment. He looked at his difficulties. He became paralysed with fear. He grasped at the first means of deliverance that suggested itself, much as a drowning man will catch at a straw. And thus, without taking counsel of his heavenly Protector, he went down into Egypt. But God used the error for the perfecting of Abraham's character. For it is impossible to suppose that Abraham's conception of God was not vastly enlarged by this incident, and this especially in two particulars.

(1) Abraham must have received a new impression regarding God's *truth*. It would seem that as yet he had no very clear idea of God's holiness. He had the idea of God which Muhammadans entertain, and past which they seem unable to get. He conceived of God as the Supreme Ruler; he had a firm belief in the unity of God and probably a hatred of idolatry and a profound contempt for idolaters. He believed that this Supreme God could always and easily accomplish His will, and that the voice that inwardly guided him was the voice of God. His own character had not yet been deepened and dignified by prolonged intercourse with God and by close observation of His actual ways; and so as yet he knew little of what constitutes the true glory of God. For learning that truth is an essential attribute of God he could not have gone to a better school than Egypt. His own reliance on God's promise might have been expected to produce in him a high esteem for truth and a clear recognition of its essential place in the Divine Character. Apparently it had only partially had this effect. The heathen, therefore, must teach him. Had not Abraham seen the look of indignation and injury on the face of Pharaoh, he might have left the land

[1] S. A. Brooke, *The Old Testament and Modern Life*, 43.

feeling that his scheme had succeeded admirably. But as he went at the head of his vastly increased household, the envy of many who saw his long train of camels and cattle, he would have given up all could he have blotted from his mind's eye the reproachful face of Pharaoh and nipped out this entire episode from his life.

(2) But whether Abraham fully learned this lesson or not, there can be little doubt that at this time he did receive fresh and abiding impressions of God's *faithfulness and sufficiency.* In Abraham's first response to God's call he exhibited a remarkable independence and strength of character. His abandonment of home and kindred on account of a religious faith which he alone possessed, was the act of a man who relied much more on himself than on others, and who had the courage of his convictions. This qualification for playing a great part in human affairs he undoubtedly had. But he had also the defects of his qualities. A weaker man would have shrunk from going into Egypt, and would have preferred to see his flocks dwindle rather than take so venturesome a step. No such hesitations could trammel Abraham's movements. He felt himself equal to all occasions. That part of his character which was reproduced in his grandson Jacob—a readiness to rise to every emergency that called for management and diplomacy, an aptitude for dealing with men and using them for his purposes—came to the front now. He left Egypt in a much more healthy state of mind, practically convinced of his own inability to work his way to the happiness God had promised him, and equally convinced of God's faithfulness and power to bring him through all the embarrassments and disorders into which his own folly and sin might bring him. He returned to Canaan humbled and very little disposed to feel confident in his own powers of managing in emergencies, but quite assured that God might at all times be relied on. He was convinced that God was not depending upon him, but he upon God.

¶ I feel that goodness and truth and righteousness are realities, eternal realities, and that they cannot be abstractions or vapours floating in a spiritual atmosphere, but that they necessarily imply a living personal will, a good, loving, righteous God, in whose hands we are perfectly safe, and who is guiding us by unfailing wisdom. I have known in my life two or three persons who, I knew,

honestly and earnestly and unceasingly endeavoured to help me to be a right man; and now, in looking back on these persons, I feel what a deep confidence this purpose of theirs inspired me with, and I am conscious of having a similar confidence in God through all varieties in His treatment of me, because I have in my conscience the continual proof that He never for a moment relaxes His earnest purpose that I should be right.[1]

Since the dear hour that brought me to Thy foot,
And cut up all my follies by the root,
I never trusted in an arm but Thine,
Nor hoped, but in Thy righteousness divine;
My prayers and alms, imperfect and defiled,
Were but the feeble efforts of a child;
Howe'er performed, it was their brightest part,
That they proceeded from a grateful heart;
Cleansed in Thine own all-purifying blood,
Forgive their evil, and accept their good;
I cast them at Thy feet—my only plea
Is what it was, dependence upon Thee;
While struggling in the vale of tears below,
That never failed, nor shall it fail me now.
Angelic gratulations rend the skies,
Pride falls unpitied, never more to rise,
Humility is crowned, and Faith receives the prize.[2]

[1] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, ii. 154.
[2] Cowper.

ABRAHAM.

IV.

Lot.

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Lot.

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the Plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar. So Lot chose him all the Plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east.—Gen. xiii. 10, 11.

The famine which had driven Abraham into Egypt having passed away, he returned to the southern part of Canaan, whence he had set out, and by easy stages reached his old encampment at Bethel. Here, preserved from danger in a foreign land, and greatly enriched in worldly wealth, he offered his thanksgiving unto the Lord, and thought for a time to have had rest. But it was not so to be. What Christ said to His followers, what is a true word to all God's servants—"In the world ye shall have tribulation"—was indeed the experience of the patriarch. We know the blessedness of affliction; Abraham was learning the lesson. The occasion was the prosperity which God had bestowed upon him. The large increase in the cattle of Abraham and his nephew necessitated a wider area of pasturage than had formerly been required. This made necessary the choice involving the separation between Abraham and Lot, which we have now to consider.

I.

The Choice.

1. When we endeavour to piece together the scattered allusions of the sacred story so as to form a picture of the outward life of Abraham, it is as a wealthy emir or shepherd-chieftain that we have to represent him. His wealth was portable. It consisted mainly in extensive flocks of sheep and goats, which

were bred chiefly for their wool, and the milk of which, more than their flesh, furnished the staple article of food. To these were added smaller herds of camels and asses, but not horses, to be employed in riding or as beasts of burden. Oxen were probably of less consequence until the use of the plough became general. But though cattle constituted the leading item in the chief's property, a metallic medium of exchange was not unknown. For this purpose silver was used in uncoined masses (probably ring-shaped), the value of which, whether impressed upon each or not, could always be ascertained by weighing them. Gold is not spoken of as a currency; but it was twisted into armlets, nose-rings, and similar objects of female ornament.

¶ Not many years ago much offence was given by one, now a high dignitary in the English Church, who ventured to suggest the original likeness of Abraham, by calling him a Bedouin Sheykh. It is one advantage flowing from the multiplication of Eastern travels that such offence could now no longer be taken. Every English pilgrim to the Holy Land, even the most reverential and the most fastidious, is delighted to trace and to record the likeness of patriarchal manners and costumes in the Arabian chiefs. To refuse to do so would be to decline the use of what we may almost call a singular gift of Providence. The unchanged habits of the East render it in this respect a kind of living Pompeii. The outward appearances which in the case of the Greeks and Romans we know only through art and writing, through marble, fresco, and parchment, in the case of Jewish history we know through the forms of actual men, living and moving before us, wearing almost the same garb, speaking in almost the same language, and certainly with the same general turns of speech and tone and manners. Such as we see them now, starting on a pilgrimage, or a journey, were Abraham and his brother's son, when they "went forth" to go into the land of Canaan. "All their substance that they had 'gathered'" is heaped high on the backs of their kneeling camels. The "slaves" that they "had bought in Haran" run along by their sides. Round about them are their flocks of sheep and goats, and the asses moving underneath the towering forms of the camels. The chief is there, amidst the stir of movement, or resting at noon within his black tent, marked out from the rest by his cloak of brilliant scarlet, by the fillet of rope which binds the loose handkerchief round his head, by the spear which he holds in his hand to guide the march, and to fix the encampment. The chief's wife, the princess of the

tribe, is there in her own tent, to make the cakes and prepare the usual meal of milk and butter; the slave or the child is ready to bring in the red lentil soup for the weary hunter, or to kill the calf for the unexpected guest. Even the ordinary social state is the same; polygamy, slavery, the exclusiveness of family ties; the period of service for the dowry of a wife: the solemn obligations of hospitality; the temptations, easily followed, into craft or falsehood.[1]

2. In every aspect, except that which most concerns us, the likeness is complete between the Bedouin chief of the present day and the Bedouin chief who came from Chaldæa some four thousand years ago. In every aspect but one; and that one contrast is set off in the highest degree by the resemblance of all besides. The more we see the outward conformity of Abraham and his immediate descendants to the godless, grasping, foul-mouthed Arabs of the modern desert, and even their fellowship in the infirmities of their common state and country, the more we shall recognize the force of the religious faith which has raised them from that low estate to be the heroes and saints of their people, the spiritual fathers of European religion and civilization. The hands are the hands of the Bedouin Esau; but the voice is the voice of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the voice which still makes itself heard across deserts and continents and seas; heard wherever there is a conscience to listen, or an imagination to be pleased, or a sense of reverence left amongst mankind.

Let us, in order to see this contrast, return to the story, which now deepens in power and interest, and in the sculpture of a great character. A quarrel arose between the herdsmen of Lot and Abraham; and in human affairs the quarrels of servants finally involve the masters. All the world is linked together into a family, though nine-tenths of the world deny this truth. It is no use denying it, and the truth acts sharply in punishment on those who contradict it. Systematic denial of it by nations, by classes, by families, by societies, means fighting, misery, famine, desolation, cruelty, barbarism, revolution, the red flag of blood and fire and social hatred waving in the hurricane of war. The powerful in the quarrel crush the weak, until the weak, becoming powerful, crush their foes in turn. In national and social quarrels this is

[1] A. P. Stanley, *The Jewish Church*, i. 9.

the way of the thing we call civilization, the ignoble result of the principle that self-interest is the law of progress. "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

3. As yet the character of Lot has not been exhibited, and we can only calculate from the relation he bears to Abraham what his answer to the proposal will probably be. We know that Abraham has been the making of his nephew, and that the land belongs to Abraham; and we should expect that in common decency Lot would set aside the generous offer of his uncle and demand that he alone should determine the matter.

The two men stood on the rocky summit of Bethel and looked down on either side, east and west. East rose the sharp-toothed range of hills above Jericho. Beyond them lay the steep valley of the Jordan, and Lot knew, by report, of the wealthy land of the cities of the plain. Westward and southward were the naked hills of Judah, and the rocky passes where Benjamin afterwards housed like a wolf, and the range where Hebron couched—a difficult and rugged land, dwelt in by rude tribes; a pilgrim's mountain country. Here the choice was made, and the story takes a more solemn turn, and is weighty with a deeper moral, a moral driven home by the writer, to the grave issues of life, and charged with a religious humanity. Lot, instead of rivalling, traded on his uncle's magnanimity; and chose him all the plains of Jordan because in his eye it was the richest part of the land.

¶ Dean Stanley, with a few firm touches, has sketched the panorama from Abraham's tent. "To the east there rises in the foreground the jagged range of the hills above Jericho; in the distance the dark wall of Moab; between them lies the wide valley of the Jordan, its course marked by the tract of forest in which its rushing stream is enveloped; and down to this valley a long and deep ravine, now, as always, the main line of communication by which it is approached from the central hills of Palestine, a ravine rich with vine, olive, and fig, winding its way through ancient reservoirs and sepulchres, remains of a civilization now extinct, but in the times of the patriarchs not yet begun. To the

south and the west the view commanded the bleak hills of Judæa, varied by the heights crowned with what were afterwards the cities of Benjamin, and overhanging what in a later day was to be Jerusalem, and in the far distance the southern range on whose slope is Hebron. Northward are the hills which divide Judæa from the rich plains of Samaria."[1]

4. Let us look for a moment at Lot's choice. The well-watered plain of Jordan is a great prize for any man, and Lot has made sure of it. His estate is large, and is favoured by the sun and the clouds. Is there, then, any drawback? Read: "But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." A great estate, but bad neighbours! Material glory, but moral shame! Noble landscapes, but mean men! But Lot did just what men are doing to-day. He made choice of a home without making any inquiry as to the religious state of the neighbourhood. They do not care how poor the Church is, if the farm be good. They will give up the most inspiring ministry in the world for ten feet more garden, or a paddock to feed an ass in. They will tell you that the house is roomy, the garden is large, the air is balmy, the district is genteel; and if you ask them what religious teaching they will have there, they tell you they really do not know, but must inquire! They will take away six children into a moral desert for the sake of a garden to play in; they will leave Paul or Apollos for six feet of greenhouse! Others again fix their tent where they can get the best food for the heart's life; and they sacrifice a summer-house that they may now and again get a peep of heaven.[2]

¶ There is a solemn choice in life. Life and death, light and darkness, truth and lies are set before us. At every instant the cry comes for us to choose one or the other, and the choice of one involves the putting away of the other. And we must choose. That is one of the certainties of life. There is no such thing as offering one hand to God and another to evil; one hand to the self-sacrifice of Christ, and the other to the coveteousness of the world. You cannot serve God and Mammon. You cannot follow Jesus at home, and your own pleasure in your outward life. Your life, whether you like it or not, becomes of one piece.[3]

5. The moment Abraham chose the simple life, lofty and

[1] A. P. Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, 218. [2] J. Parker. [3] S. A. Brooke.

unreproved, with God, God spoke to him. "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, eastward and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth for multitude. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for unto thee will I give it." A spiritual reward for a spiritual act; the possession of an exalted thought—the thought of the mighty people which were to flow from him. For the country was not his, save in spiritual possession, in the thought of its belonging to his seed after him. And in that thought Abraham lived the uplifting life of faith, such faith as some of us have in the glory of the race which shall come after us. No actual possession of the earth spoiled or tainted that life, as he wandered to and fro. No; there was not one solitary touch of the world in his heart from now until he died.

¶ In his character of Abraham the writer has uplifted our whole conception of humanity; and to do that so long ago, to hand down that great tradition to the reverence and aspiration of mankind, to give this impulse and passion to men and women and children, was to do a greater and more useful thing than to make a thousand inventions for material progress. Verily, the poets and story-tellers who image forth noble and beautiful human life and character have, while they represent the true rewards of others, their one immortal and marvellous reward.[1]

What though thine arm hath conquered in the fight,—
  What though the vanquished yield unto thy sway
  Or riches garnered pave thy golden way,—
Not therefore hast thou gained the sovran height
Of man's nobility! No halo's light
  From these thou shalt round thee shed its sacred ray;
  If these be all thy joy,—then dark thy day,
And darker still thy swift approaching night!

But if in thee more truly than in others
  Hath dwelt love's charity;—if by thine aid
  Others have passed above thee, and if thou,
Though victor, yieldest victory to thy brothers,
  Though conquering conquered, and a vassal made,—
  Then take thy crown, well mayst thou wear it now.[2]

[1] S. A. Brooke, *The Old Testament and Modern Life*, 51. [2] Samuel Waddington.

II.

The Rescue.

And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.—Gen. xiv. 12.

And Abram brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.—Gen. xiv. 16.

"Then Abraham removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the 'oak grove' of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord." Here we have the third and chief resting-place of the wandering patriarch. This is the nearest approach to a home that the wanderings of Abraham present. Underneath the tree his tent was pitched when he sat in the heat of the Eastern noon. Thither came the mysterious visitants. In their entertainment is presented every characteristic of genuine Arab hospitality, which has given to Abraham the name of "The Father of Guests." But there is another spot in Hebron which gives a yet more permanent and domestic character to its connexion with Abraham's life. When Darius pursued the Scythians into their wilderness, they told him that the only place which they could appoint for a meeting was by the tombs of their fathers. The ancestral burial-place is the one fixed element in the unstable life of a nomadic race; and this was what Hebron furnished to the patriarchs. For the cave of Machpelah lay opposite the terebinths of Mamre and both belonged to Hebron itself, which in ancient times extended farther than now, and was indeed no hill-city properly so called, but stretched at least to the Rumeidi-mount.

1. When Lot made choice of the well-watered plain, it does not seem to have occurred to him that it would be a likely place to excite the envy of kings and men of war. Like his mother and ours, he saw that the sight was pleasant to the eyes, and for that reason he put forth his hand and took all he could get. He soon found, however, that there were other people in the world besides himself, and that he could not keep the prize a secret. He would not leave it for Abraham's enjoyment, and now we shall see if he

can keep it for his own. Kings were plentiful in that neighbourhood; some nine of them seemed to be within easy distance of each other; and those nine kings divided themselves into fighting parties, four against five, and the four conquered the five, driving the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah into the slime-pits and causing the others to flee to the mountains. Then, conqueror-like, they took everything they could lay their hands upon, and amongst the rest they "took Lot and his goods."

¶ This experience of Lot introduces us to an entirely new scene in the life of Abraham. The peaceful history of ch. xiii., which made us acquainted with his pacific disposition, is now followed by the history of a war, the first met with in Holy Scripture. This first is a war of conquest, waged for the subjugation of foreign nations and States; the world-empire, which subsequently made Israel also the aim of its conquering power, is here already in course of development. So far as we have already become acquainted with Abraham, he has shown himself obedient, thankful, unselfish, submitting to Divine guidance, and, when he has offended by acting independently, penitently returning to his former attitude. We here see his faith, in virtue of which he obtains the victory over self, gathering itself up in God and breaking forth in an act of love that overcomes the world. The leader of flocks appears as a leader of war, aiding kings against kings, in a greatness surpassing them all; for the three dignities, the prophetic, priestly and royal, which are separated in the times of the law, are still united in the patriarchs.[1]

2. Much has been written concerning this interesting chapter of the Bible. The earlier critics were of opinion that it was impossible that the power of the Elamites should have extended so far at such an early epoch. But there can now be no doubt that the Elamites and Babylonians were quite powerful enough, at the time of Abraham, to make an expedition of the magnitude described in Gen. xiv. Sargon of Agadé held sway over this district, and he reigned, according to Nabonidus's indications, more than 1500 years earlier. His son, when he came to the throne, added Elam to his dominions as well. That the position should, at a considerably later period, be reversed, is easily conceivable, and it was to all appearance the Elamites who held sway in a part of Babylonia, of which country many of the states

[1] F. Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, 394.

undoubtedly acknowledged Elamite overlordship, though with exceeding unwillingness.

¶ Although, in their present literary form, these stories seem to be late, it does not necessarily follow that they do not embody very old traditions. Chedorlaomer is clearly an Elamite name (Kudur-Lagamar). Amraphel may well be the later form of the name of the famous Babylonian king Hammurabi who ultimately delivered his nation from the Elamite yoke. Ellasar is perhaps the Hebrew form of Larsa, one of the important towns of southern Babylonia. Goiim may be a variant for Gutium, an ancient state lying between Babylonia and Media. The fact that the Elamites ruled Babylonia prior to 2200 B.C. and that these Eastern powers at times extended their authority to the Mediterranean is established by the testimony of the Babylonian inscriptions. The evidence, therefore, is reasonably conclusive that the story of the four kings embodies genuine historical data. The record was most probably kept in Babylonia, where the cuneiform system of writing was in use from an early period. The names of the Palestinian cities might have been preserved by Canaanitish tradition—possibly in written records. Likewise the references to Melchizedek, although probably introduced later into the present story, may rest upon a historical basis. The site of Solomon's temple was probably an ancient Canaanitish sacred place. El Elyon (God Most High) was worshipped by the Phœnicians, and therefore by the Canaanites as well as the Hebrews. Priest-kings appear in earliest Semitic history. The name Melchizedek is strikingly similar to Adonizedek, a later king of Jerusalem, mentioned in Josh. x. Melchizedek's words are in the form of an ancient oracle, which probably represents the original nucleus of the tradition. It must be remembered, however, that all of the identifications suggested above are only possibilities, not certainties. Until they are further proved or disproved by the testimony of the monuments, it is exceedingly hazardous to base important conclusions upon them.[1]

3. The final struggle was in the vale of Siddim. In that "Valley of the Fields" was fought the first battle of Palestine. Two of the five kings were slain in the conflict, and the routed army fled up the steep passes of the enclosing hills. The victors carried off their spoil and captives, and retreated up the long valley of the Jordan on their homeward march.

Abraham was sitting in his tent door, under the great oak of

[1] C. F. Kent, *Narratives of the Beginnings of Hebrew History*, 85.

Mamre, when a fugitive from the vale of Siddim brought the tidings of his nephew's captivity. This was no time for rending of garments and fruitless lamentations. Arming his own servants —three hundred and eighteen—and sending a hasty summons to Mamre, and his brothers Eshcol and Aner, to join him, he set off in hot pursuit. Passing Bethlehem and Salem, he swept over the mountains, and along the plains of Sychar and Esdraelon, and at the close of the fourth day (Josephus says he attacked them on the fifth night) he was probably climbing the hills of Naphtali. From these bold headlands he could see with perfect distinctness the enemy carousing in careless security around the fountain of Leddan. Having made the necessary dispositions for the attack, he waits for the veil of darkness; then, like an avalanche from the mountains, he bursts upon the sleeping host. The panic is immediate and universal, the confusion inextricable, the rout wild and ruinous. No one knows friend from foe. They trample down and slay each other, are swamped in miry canals, and entangled and torn to pieces in the thorny jungles of Banaisy. Terror lends wings to the fugitives. They climb Castle Hill, rush along the vale of Yafury, and descending to the great plain by Beit Jenn, cease not their frantic flight until they reach Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. Abraham returns victorious to Laish, which is Dan; the captives are released, and the goods collected. None have perished; nothing is lost. In triumph, and with devout thanksgiving, he who through faith waxed valiant in battle marches back by Jerusalem to his tent on the plain of Mamre.[1]

¶ Abraham was striking his iron within five minutes of the tidings from the valley. He met his difficulties, first by quick counsel, then by getting his folk to stand shoulder to shoulder, and then by the swiftest action, taken on the instant and pursued without a pause until the deed was done. This is what delights us in the story. The spirit of human help was in Abraham, and the hand did with flying ardour what the spirit called for. For want of this speed enterprises of great pith and moment fail. For want of this sudden fire of deed, after resolute counsel has been taken, how often have we lost the good we might have done in life; how often have we failed to help men, to deliver the captives of wrong, to rescue the spoil from the cheater, to restore peace

[1] W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 214.

to the family or to our society, to establish our cause for the sake of man, to win the crown of saving men! We go on taking counsel till the hour is past; we delay acting till action is of no use; or we take no counsel, and, having no wise plan, break down in action; or we act alone, not having previously made trusty and faithful comrades, not having previously gained them by proving that we want nothing for ourselves. Unsupported then, having no plan, we linger in our tent, and when we do resolve to act, it is too late. The kings of the East have reached their own country; the captives are slaves; the spoil is not rescued. The opportunity is lost.[1]

¶ "When the costly hall of the Young Men's Christian Association took fire in 1867," wrote the Rev. Mr. Macrae, "the secretary and other officials, as soon as they found the building was doomed, ran about the merchants in the city for subscriptions. 'Our hall is burning, sir; the engines are at work, but there is no hope. We shall want a new one. Let us have money enough to begin at once!' Thousands upon thousands of dollars were subscribed without a moment's hesitation, and it is said that before the fire was out money enough had been raised to build a new hall in a style of even greater magnificence than the first. This is only a specimen of the lightning Christianity of Chicago."[2]

III

The King of Sodom.

With large booty and the rescued captives Abraham returned in peace to the valley of the Jordan. But so successful an exploit, involving such a vast benefit to the inhabitants of the country, could not be allowed to pass unacknowledged. The reputation and the influence of the stranger chieftain were largely increased by this expedition, and the gratitude of the people was shown in various ways. First of all the king of Sodom came forth to meet him, to congratulate him on his success, and to receive his portion of spoil from his hands. The place of meeting is called "the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale." This is probably the northern part of the valley of the Kidron, where the "tombs of the kings" are now shown, and where the childless Absalom reared a memorial for himself that his name might not be forgotten.

[1] S. A. Brooke. [2] *The Life of D. L. Moody*, 107.

Full of gratitude for Abraham's valiant rescue, the king of Sodom wished eagerly to reward him for his services. "Give me the captives of my people whom thou hast delivered; I want no more; keep thou everything else which thou hast taken from the enemy."

It must have been a very tempting offer. No slight matter for a shepherd to have the chance of appropriating all the spoils of settled townships, so large and opulent; especially when he seemed to have some claim on them. But Abraham would not hear of it for a moment. Indeed, he seems to have already undergone some exercise of soul on the matter, for speaking as of a past transaction, he said, "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet; and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich."

This is the high uplifted spirit which wins the hearts of nations and of comrades; which initiates nobly and continues splendidly great efforts and great causes. It is the spirit which makes a nation great and useful to the whole of humanity; which should be also at the root of our daily life, even of our daily business. Think only how this part of Abraham's character has travelled over a thousand generations, and laid its power for good and for honour on them all. Every noble Jew felt it breathing in him, every generous Muhammadan feels it to this day. The whole of Christendom has loved, admired, and reverenced it. It has saved endless folk from the greedy spirit in the world. All the work of commerce, all the inventions of science, are as nothing in the progress of mankind, compared to the sowing of this spirit in the field of humanity.

¶ Certain moralists speak as if it were a higher thing to do one's duty with a cold heart, by virtue of moral choice alone, than to find joy in helping others. A distorted theory of unselfishness may lead to strange conclusions, and result in placing the angels a little lower in the scale than mere man. Whether in moments of analysis (with which he would be afflicted) he might have maintained some such thesis himself or not, it is no true account of my brother's nature. For he had the temper of love, and could not help it. He took pleasure in doing kind things; and of the blessedness of giving the days brought him great store; while he

refused to be discouraged by the inevitable disappointments that clog the heels of generosity. He never read Martial, but that noble line of his—

Quas dederis, solas semper habebis opes—

seemed written somewhere within him.[1]

The better portion didst thou choose, Great Heart,
Thy God's first choice, and pledge of Gentile grace!
Faith's truest type, he with unruffled face
Bore the world's smile, and bade her slaves depart;
Whether, a trader, with no trader's art,
He buys in Canaan his last resting-place,—
Or freely yields rich Siddim's ample space,—
Or braves the rescue, and the battle's smart,
Yet scorns the heathen gifts of those he saved.
O happy in their soul's high solitude,
Who commune thus with God, and not with earth!
Amid the scoffings of the wealth-enslaved,
A ready prey, as though in absent mood
They calmly move, nor reck the unmanner'd mirth.[2]

IV.

Melchizedek.

1. Unwilling as Abraham was to accept any of the plunder in acknowledgment of the service he had rendered, he was careful at the same time to rob neither man nor God. His native allies received their share. Before distribution of it was made, however, one-tenth of the entire property which had been recovered in battle was solemnly dedicated as an act of religious homage to Almighty God, in response to the Divine benediction conveyed through the hands of His priest Melchizedek.

2. It is thus there steps upon the scene one of the most mysterious personages of Holy Writ. Nothing that we have thus far been able to gather respecting the religious condition of Canaan in the age of Abraham has prepared us to find at the head of any of its tribes, not only a worshipper of the true God,

[1] Hastings Crossley, in *The Life of F. W. Crossley*, by Rendel Harris, 227.
[2] J. H. Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions.*

but a man of such priestly sanctity that beneath his hand the patriarch himself bows to receive the blessing of God, and through him the patriarch prefers his grateful offerings to Jehovah. Even in the simple prose of Genesis, the incident reads as though it meant more than meets the ear. The brief and unexplained introduction, only this once, of a person so eminent, his symbolical acts and lofty relation to Abraham, with the significance of his name and title, combining as these do the related ideas of righteousness and peace—these things combine to invest him with an air of mystery, and must early have fastened on him a curious and reverential attention.

Let us conceive the scene. Yonder is a small but strong town, situated upon the same cliff on which a thousand years later was seated the stronghold of David. Its name is Salem. Its gates are now open, and there pours forth from them a solemn procession of men clad in festal garments, and with festal joy and gladness upon their countenances. At the head of this consecrated band we see the venerable form of an aged man. He is at once the king and priest of Salem, and he bears the honoured name of Melchizedek, *i.e.* "king of righteousness." He knows of Abraham, knows also of his valiant conflict with the enemies and destroyers of Canaan, and has come forth to meet him. Like a careful and compassionate mother, bringing refreshment to her weary and returning son, Melchizedek bears in his hands bread and wine to strengthen Abraham's body and soul. And not only this, but as he meets the patriarch he lifts up his hands upon him in benediction, and says: "Blessed be Abraham of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand." The praise of God from the mouth of this mysterious unknown by no means sounds strange to Abraham. He does not think of declining the blessing of this priest. No, thrilled by a sacred awe, he falls down, lets himself be blessed, and gives Melchizedek the tenth of all that he had at hand. By this gift of the tenth he acknowledges him as one spiritually his superior, and as having therefore the right and power to bless him, the inferior.

3. The author of one of the most Messianic of all Israel's

lyrics was guided to borrow this venerable figure of the grand, dim priest-king of old, before whom even the founder of his people took the second place, in order to foreshadow that coming Seed of Abraham in whom was to meet every office of dignity and of service. A Priest He was to be above all consecrated men of Israel's race; a King nobler far in blood and ampler in sway than the royal singer who owned Him for his Lord. Under His safe and equitable government should be fulfilled that perfect ideal of a just ruler which David extolled with dying lips—one who "rules in the fear of God," and whose influence upon his happy subjects is like the cloudless light of dawn, when after rain the sun rises in perfect peace upon the tender grass. Finally, David's poetical employment of Melchizedek to set forth the surpassing elevation of Messiah is made the basis of a long theological argument by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews; and justly, so far as the purpose which the writer has in view is concerned. For both in history and in poetical prophecy, the position assigned to this remarkable figure is clearly one which cannot be ranked alongside the descendants of Abraham, but must be placed above them. No priestly Israelite, sprung from Abraham through his great-grandson Levi, can claim as lofty or Divine a priesthood as the man before whom Abraham himself was content to bend for the blessing. If "perfection" had been attained "through the Levitical priesthood" (it was fair for the Christian teacher to ask his Jewish brethren), "what further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek?"

¶ The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews assumes that the object of the Law was to bring or to prepare for bringing the people to "perfection": Divine legislation can have no other end. The priesthood, on which the Law rested, embodied its ruling idea. And conversely in the Law as a complete system we can see the aim of the priesthood. The priesthood therefore was designed to assist in bringing about this "perfection." If then there had been a bringing to perfection through the Levitical priesthood—if in other words there had been a bringing to perfection through the Law—there would have been no need of another priesthood. If on the other hand the whole Law failed to accomplish that to which it pointed, then so far also the priesthood failed. Such a failure, not a failure but the fulfilment of the Divine purpose,

was indicated by the promise of another priesthood in a new line.[1]

¶ The argument may seem to be out of date. But I am prepared to say that I have never yet found in the New Testament any allusions to the ancient Jewish Scriptures, any illustrations derived from the ancient Jewish ritual, which, when seriously and patiently studied, have not proved to be logically and philosophically just. The books of Moses and the prophets are never treated by the inspired writers as affording materials out of which an ingenious fancy has licence to construct unsubstantial demonstrations of truths which the authority of Christ and of His apostles sufficiently authenticate; but as containing imperfect and elementary revelations—hints and foreshadowings—in which a mind that has comprehended the general structure and purpose of the ancient system may recognize the outlines and anticipations of the fully developed Christian faith.[2]

4. Melchizedek is the one personage on earth whom Abraham recognizes as his spiritual superior. Abraham accepts his blessing and pays him tithes, apparently as priest of the Most High God; so that, in paying to him, Abraham is giving the tenth of his spoils to God. This is not any mere courtesy of private persons. It was done in presence of various parties of jealously watchful retainers. Men of rank and office and position *consider* how they should act to one another and who should take precedence. And Abraham did deliberately, and with a perfect perception of what he was doing, whatever he now did. Manifestly therefore God's revelation of Himself was not as yet confined to the one line running from Abraham to Christ. Here was a man of whom we really do not know whether he was a Canaanite, a son of Ham or a son of Shem; yet Abraham recognizes him as having knowledge of the true God, and even bows to him as his spiritual superior in office if not in experience. This shows us how little jealousy Abraham had of others being favoured by God, how little he thought *his* connexion with God would be less secure if other men enjoyed a similar connexion, and how heartily he welcomed those who with different rites and different prospects yet worshipped the living God. It shows us also how apt we are to limit God's ways of working; and how little we understand of

[1] B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 180.

[2] R. W. Dale, *The Jewish Temple and the Christian Church*, 143.

the connexions He has with those who are not situated as we ourselves are. Here, while all our attention is concentrated on Abraham as carrying the whole spiritual hope of the world, there emerges from an obscure Canaanite valley a man nearer to God than Abraham is. From how many unthought-of places such men may at any time come out upon us, we really can never tell.

¶ I do not think that my Master will say my charity is too large, or my inclusiveness too great. Alas! alas! when I see Romanists cursing the Church of England, Evangelicals shaking their heads about the Christianity of Tractarians, Tractarians banning Dissenters, Dissenters anathematizing Unitarians, and Unitarians of the old school condemning the more spiritual ones of the new, I am forced to hope that there is more inclusiveness in the love of God than in the bitter orthodoxy of sects and churches. I find only two classes who roused His Divine indignation when on earth: those who excluded bitterly—the Scribes, and those of a religious name—*the* popular religious party of the day, who judged frailty and error bitterly—the Pharisees. I am certain that I do not dilute truth, at least what I count truth, nor hold lax views about opinions; but I am certain that men are often better than their creed, and that our Lord's mode of judging of the tree by its fruits is the only true one.[1]

O Love Divine!—whose constant beam
Shines on the eyes that will not see,
And waits to bless us, while we dream
Thou leavest us because we turn from Thee!

All souls that struggle and aspire,
All hearts of prayer by Thee are lit;
And, dim or clear, Thy tongues of fire
On dusky tribes and twilight centuries sit.

Nor bounds, nor clime, nor creed Thou know'st;
Wide as our need Thy favours fall;
The white wings of the Holy Ghost
Stoop, seen or unseen, o'er the heads of all.[2]

[1] *Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson*, 401.
[2] Whittier, *The Shadow and the Light*.

ABRAHAM.

V.

THE COVENANT-PROMISES.

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Williams, I., *The Characters of the Old Testament* (1870), 34.

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The Covenant-Promises.

After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. —Gen. xv. 1.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.—Gen. xvii. 1, 2.

The fifteenth chapter of Genesis introduces the subject of the promises made to Abraham and the covenant entered into for their fulfilment. Hitherto Abraham had been the recipient of promises and blessings; and all seems ready for the moment when he may be installed as the head of a new covenant, and receive the promised seed. But now various delays, hindrances, and disappointments intervene, in overcoming which he gives evidence both of the strength of his faith and of the Providence continually watching over him. Thus the following narratives exhibit, under different aspects, Abraham's moral education and probation, until at last the perfect man of God, the hero of faith, who is to serve as a pattern to all coming generations, stands fully portrayed before us. The point about which Abraham's trials mainly centre is the attainment and possession of a bodily heir, who should found the covenant-race.

I.

Abraham's Hopes and Fears.

1. Never had Abraham stood higher in honour or sustained a more heroic part than at the close of the Eastern invasion. Yet, by a revulsion not unusual with men of a highly strung temperament, it was "after these things" that he fell into a despondent,

dispirited condition. He began to be alarmed for his position; and this seems to have led him half to question the words on which for ten years he had been building his life, and half to feel as though any fulfilment they were likely to have was scarcely worth waiting for. This is not the attitude of mind which is commonly associated with the model man of faith. It shows that he was subject to like passions with other men. His faith had its conflicts with doubt, and his courage its intervals of depression, like those of lesser believers.

2. Several reasons for such a mood at this juncture in his affairs can be fairly guessed at, and are worth attention.

(1) For one thing, a certain reaction was natural after the sudden and unaccustomed strain of the Sodom war. His hurried levy and rapid chase; the night attack, crowned with splendid success; the solemn home-coming; the high-pitched devotion in which he offered the first-fruits of spoil to God; and the generous temper with which he refused for himself the value of a thread—all these formed so great a change from the placid, uneventful years of a shepherd as partly to explain the reaction which followed.

(2) Besides, his over-wrought spirits might well sink when he calmly reviewed the situation. He had defeated Chedorlaomer, it was true, by a surprise; but in doing so he had made an enemy of the most powerful monarch in Asia, and the arm which was long enough to chastise the revolted cities could easily avenge itself upon one man. How was he to withstand a fresh foray from the Euphrates, supposing the confederates to return next season; especially since, by his attitude to the king of Sodom, he had just thrown away his first good chance for securing a foothold in the land, or a predominant position of influence among its native tribes? Nay, was it wise, or was it worth his while, to have put himself forward as a "shield" or champion of the territory which God had promised him, seeing that, were it ten times his own, it must after all pass into the hand of a stranger?

¶ It is easy to compare this with our life. The experience is common enough. We have had all our energies called upon; we have had a time of vivid employment and excitement; we have won that for which we went forth upon the war-path; and now

we return to quiet, uneventful life again; home after a long voyage, back to the country after a London season, back to commonplace work after an eager episode of fame or what seemed like fame, back to monotony after excitement. And a dark mood descends on us; dulness of being, deep depression. This is our reaction. And it generally takes the line of the chief aim or the chief sorrow of our life. That thing for which we have steadily worked ever since we were young seems to us to be marked out for failure. That hope of success in business, in literature, in art, which shone before us like a star and beckoned us on, is darkened in the sky. "We are no good," we think; "our life is broken. All the ideas we had are baffled by misfortune." Or we go back and think of the great sorrows, the special troubles which are the steady distress of being—the one whose love we missed, the friend we lost, the poverty which suddenly overwhelmed us, the son we, like Abraham, have not got, and we sink deeper and deeper into gloom. It is a common story.[1]

II.

The Promises.

God had already made promises to Abraham. But ten years had elapsed since he bade farewell to his fatherland at God's bidding, yet the hopes with which he entered Canaan seemed as far as ever from being realized. Only twice during these years had God broken silence. The voice which spoke in Haran had spoken once at Moreh on his arrival, and again near Bethel on his return from Egypt. Each successive utterance confirmed what had gone before. Each added a little definiteness to the original promise. In Haran God said: "I will shew thee a land: I will make of thee a great nation." At Moreh, both the halves of this promise became better defined: "This is the land: I will give it to thy seed." Still more ample was the third repetition of it. Then Abraham was told to search Canaan through, with the assurance that it should become his own, "in the length of it and in the breadth of it": while the seed of promise was to be as numerous as the dust of the land beneath his feet. So much, then, and no more, had been given to the man on which to rest his confidence. How such prospects as these were to be realized

[1] Stopford A. Brooke.

had not yet been told. Of their ever being realized at all, no sign appeared. Abraham was a childless man. Head of a wide camp, in which were many households, where the merry shouts of little slave boys and girls rang all day long, his own tent stood aloft in the centre solitary and silent. Every year that passed made it the less likely that his union should be blessed with issue. Of what use, then, was it to risk life, as he was doing, in the land's defence if, after all, its possession was in a few years to pass to no blood descendants—no increasing clan to call him in future generations its father—but only to a servile household, with a slave for its future chieftain? Viewed in this temper of mind, the promises by which he had been allured out of Haran certainly looked less bright than they had done at first. They barely seemed to recompense him for the peril into which he had now been brought.

God directly answers the patriarch's complaint, making another and more gracious promise. Its opening words are, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." And this is only the first of three promises, which rise in grace and comprehensiveness. They appear at intervals in the patriarch's history, but we shall obtain a clearer conception of the course of Abraham's spiritual progress if we consider them here:—

(1) The first promise (Gen. xv. 1–16), opening with the words already quoted, proceeds to the assurance of a son and a very numerous seed. Sarah is not yet named as mother. (2) The second (Gen. xv. 17–19) is a renewal of the promise of the land. And the oppression in Egypt is foretold. This time the promise is accompanied by a covenant with a solemn rite. (3) The third promise is given in Gen. xvii. It is the promise of a son by Sarah. At the same time the covenant is renewed, circumcision is given as the sign of it, and the names of both Abram and Sarai are changed. Now let us consider these three promises one after another.

1. We read in Gen. xv. 1: "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision." It was no mere dream of the night that clung to his memory when he awoke; a subjective impression, perhaps, but one that was made in waking

moments. He is led forth by "the word," he is bidden look upon the stars, he offers sacrifice. It is a waking vision which is vouchsafed, and it begins with the tender injunction with which angel voices have familiarized us in the New Testament: "Fear not." The terror which frail man must feel thus brought mysteriously near unto God is subdued by these two words, and the seer is encouraged to listen to the Divine communication. "I am thy shield," said God;—we need not fear what man can do unto us. The great deliverance lately wrought proved this. "And thy exceeding great reward," or perhaps better, "thy reward shall be exceeding great." And Abraham is perplexed and disquieted by these promises, which look to the dim future for accomplishment. He sees not how in his childless condition the word can be fulfilled. "Lord God" (Adonai Jehovah), he sadly cries, combining for the first time these two names, "what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? To me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir." With no son of his own, he had conceived the idea of making this dependent the inheritor of his possessions; and it was not a design calculated to satisfy his longings, or to comfort his heart. His loneliness and desolation struck more forcibly on his soul as he heard of rich blessings laid up for him. He would go to his grave childless: what good were they to a solitary man who had none to whom to hand them down but a foreigner and a servant? He may have been a tried and trusty follower, one who had accompanied him from his first arrival in Syria, and had managed his household with skill and honour; yet he was not of the holy race, and in his hands the wealth gotten during these years would pass to aliens, and not help to keep alive his master's name and family; it might, indeed, all be carried away to Damascus, and enrich a godless people far from the promised land.

God had pity on his perplexity, while He made further trial of his faith. The astounding promise is given that his very own son shall be his heir. This aged man, whose wife was barren, should be the father of a male child, from whom should spring a posterity as numberless as the stars of heaven, which he was bidden to go forth and number. Often in his old home, among the Chaldaic astronomers, had he watched the heavens, and

acquired large notions of the number and magnitude of the bodies that revolved therein; he is henceforth to see in them a type of his own progeny, no longer compared as before (ch. xiii. 16) to the dust of the earth, but likened to the glorious lights of the firmament on high. Such promise against all experience and probability could be believed only on the authority of Him who gave it, and in perfect dependence upon His word.

(1) "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield." The casting out of fear is one of the first elements of the religion of Jesus, and it is cast out only by love. When we love the Highest, we fear nothing below it; we do not fear the Highest itself. We have awe of Him and solemn reverence, but no fear. On all sides we are freed from the curse of fear. There is no fear of man or of nature, for we are in the loving hands of their Master and Maker; no fear of God, for He is our Father. This is the doctrine of Jesus; and though it is not fully given in this ancient utterance, it is there in its noble beginnings. And the world owes a great debt to those among the Jews who here and elsewhere opposed the common view of a God who had to be approached with terror, and coaxed to lay aside His wrath by sacrifices or by the coward's prayer. That double view runs throughout the whole of the Old Testament—the priests maintaining the terror of God, the prophets the love of God. The double view lives still. There are those who dare to make Jesus a supporter of the terrifying aspect of God. There is no lie greater than this, nor one more ruinous to religion. Every thought and act of a religion based on the fear and not on the tenderness of God is a contradiction of Jesus and a curse to mankind.

(2) Abraham is to have a great reward. But it is plain that the reward is not material. He lived and died a pilgrim. He never possessed any land save a burying-place. God Himself, communion with the perfect Love, peace within, faith in his soul, mighty ideas—these are the rewards of Abraham, and they are the only rewards for which we ought to look, or which we should cherish; the only rewards which Jesus offers for our acceptance.

(3) Then see how the tenderness of God deepens. "I brought thee," God says, "out of Ur of the Chaldees, I led thee into this land; I have always been with thee. I am here with thee now

to fulfil the purpose of thy life, that for which I formed and form thee now." Personal care, personal education, personal communion, personal love—that was the conception of the writer of the story; that was his notion of the relation of God to man. It was the deepest conviction of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. It may be ours, if we have Abraham's faith; and were it ours completely, this life we lead, in spite of all its pains, nay all the more because of them, were unbroken triumph; ay, more than that, were inward growth in righteousness. For there is one pregnant phrase, well worth a life's thinking, in which the writer of this tale embodies the result of his own spiritual experience and embodies ours; the meaning of which, true and fresh to-day, is of immortal power: "Abraham believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

¶ The pupil feigned ignorance, and asked: "What is religion?"

"If you do not know from experience or intuition, I cannot explain it to you; in that case it would only seem to you folly. But if you know beforehand, you will be able to receive my explanations, which are many. Religion is connected with the Source or the head-station. But in order to carry on a conversation one must have an earth-current."

"What is that?"

"That is the draining off of superfluous earthliness to the earth. As one advances in technical knowledge, one learns to speak without a wire. But for that there are necessary strong streams of electricity, clean instruments, and clear air. The electric battery is Faith, which is not merely credence, but an apparatus for receiving and arousing the Divine electricity. Unless you believe in the possibility of success in an undertaking, you will not set to work, and accordingly you acquire no energy. With faith and a good will all is possible.[1]

2. Thus far there had been no mention made of any covenant. Neither the thing nor the name had as yet entered into the relation of this man to God. The word in which Abraham "believed" was still a bare word, unratified by ceremony or by symbol. But when the celestial voice passed from the greater promise of the seed, to renew the lesser promise of a land for the seed to dwell in, the confidence of Abraham again showed signs

[1] A. Strindberg, *Zones of the Spirit* (1913), 24.

of giving way. His wavering did not amount to incredulity. Still it went so far as to beg for a token in confirmation. His desire may have been that, as the promise of a future heir had just been confirmed by a reference to the star-lit sky, so this further promise of the heir's inheritance should be sustained by some parallel token obvious to the senses. If this were his meaning, the craving was natural enough. Weak faith must needs grope after material supports. It is noticeable that it was to such weak faith—real, yet groping—that God granted, what had certainly not been asked for, the magnificent confirmation of a covenant.

The sign given to Abraham was twofold: the smoking furnace and a prediction of the sojourn of his posterity in Egypt. The symbols were similar to those by which on other occasions the presence of God was represented. Fire, cleansing, consuming, and unapproachable, seemed to be the natural emblem of God's holiness. In the present instance it was especially suitable, because the manifestation was made after sundown and when no other could have been seen. The cutting up of the carcases and passing between the pieces was one of the customary forms of contract. It was one of the many devices men have fallen upon to make sure of one another's word. That God should condescend to adopt these modes of pledging Himself to men is significant testimony to His love; a love so resolved on accomplishing the good of men that it resents no slowness of faith and accommodates itself to unworthy suspicions. It makes itself as obvious and pledges itself with as strong guarantees to men as if it were the love of a mortal whose feelings might change and who had not clearly foreseen all consequences and issues.

It is at this point, then, that we first encounter in such a connexion this great Bible term—"covenant"; a term on which henceforth so much of the Divine dealings with mankind was to hinge, and around which the whole of theology has often been made to revolve. Not that it is the earliest occurrence of the word in Scripture. In the record of the Divine promises made to Noah as the head of the race after the Flood, we are told that God established a "covenant," of which the rainbow was constituted the perpetual "token." That covenant was an engagement on God's part that thenceforth, till the close of human history, the ordinary course of nature should be suffered to continue, unbroken

by any catastrophe on a scale so immense as to threaten the total extinction of human life. It was entered into with the entire race of human beings, considered as a portion of the sentient life on the surface of the globe, and with all other species of animals domesticated by man or serviceable to him. It was thus universal and unalterable. It referred to nothing higher than animal life on earth. It secured no moral or spiritual blessing. Quite a new thing happened when God was pleased to covenant for the second time—not now with all men, but with one man and his posterity; not with man as an earthly animal, but as an immortal spirit; not by mere promise on His own part, but by promise conditioned by religious trust and obedience on the part of man; not for the sake of guaranteeing to all men physical existence, but for the sake of securing to faithful men the spiritual blessing of eternal life. The new covenant now to be made with Abraham was thus in many respects a far higher and more valuable one than had been made with Noah. Still, it fell under the same general idea.

¶ When General Grant came to the border line of Assioot, in Upper Egypt, as he landed from his Nile boat, a bullock was sacrificed in covenant welcome, its head being put on one side of the gang-plank, and its body on the other; while its blood was between the two, so that it should be stepped over in the act of landing. And every year, when the great Hajj procession returns from Meccah to Syria, it is welcomed, as it approaches Damascus, by just such sacrifices as this. Sheep and oxen are sacrificed before the caravan, their blood being poured out in the middle of the road, and their bodies being divided and placed on either side of the way. Then those who approach by the "new and living way," on the boundary line of their country, renew their covenant with those within, by passing over the blood.

There seems to be a reference to such a mode of boundary sacrifices in the description of the Lord's covenant welcome to Abraham, on the border of the land promised to him for a possession. Abraham was near the southern boundary of Canaan. He had the promise of the Lord, that he and his seed should possess that land; but as yet he was childless, and he had no control over any portion of the land. He naturally desired some tangible assurance, in accordance with the customs of mankind, that the Lord's promises to him would be made good. Therefore when the Lord said to him, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of

the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it," Abraham replied with the question, "O Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

Then the Lord responded with these directions, apparently in accordance with a well-known mode of covenanting among men, "Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon." Abraham seems to have understood what was to be done with these victims for sacrifice. "And he took him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each half over against the other; but the birds divided he not." The blood of the victims was doubtless poured out on the earth where they were sacrificed, midway between the places of the divided portions, as is the present custom.

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace [or brazier, or censer], and a flaming torch [a fire and a light as a symbol of the Divine presence] that passed [covenant-crossed the blood on the threshold] between these pieces." And the record adds: "In that day the Lord made a covenant [a border-altar covenant] with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite, and the Kenizzite, and the Kadmonite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Rephaim, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Girgashite, and the Jebusite."

Thus Abraham was assured that the Lord had covenanted to protect his boundaries; as Nebuchadrezzar long afterward desired that his god Nebo would protect his empire boundary or threshold. As to the fact of boundary sacrifices in these lands and elsewhere, in those days and earlier, there would seem to be no room for question.[1]

3. From his birth, Ishmael was regarded by his father as the promised heir. During a period of not less than thirteen years, he grew up as the hope of his parents, and the young master of that vast pastoral household. A free, brave, wilful boy, he must have been, fit lord for a tribe of nomadic herdsmen. At length, and, so far as we know, quite suddenly, there came a day when the long silence of Heaven was once more broken. A second time God appeared, to repeat His promises with greater explicitness than before, and to seal by a sacramental symbol His servant's adhesion to the covenant.

[1] H. C. Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant*, 186.

In substance, the earlier promises to which God had bound Himself by the night ceremony thirteen years before were reiterated on this second occasion. But they were reiterated with an amplitude and completeness which had never been approached. All the three items or factors in the Divine intentions with respect to this man were now disentangled from one another, and expressed with such formal elaborateness of statement as might almost suggest the phraseology of a legal document. These three, to put them most briefly, were the promises of the Seed, of the Land, and of the Blessing. (1) First, a most numerous and wide-branching posterity was secured by the contract. Already it had been again and again promised—first in Haran, next at Bethel, and last at Mamre. The fullest expression was now given to it in these words: "Thou shalt be a father of many nations. I will make thee exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of thee; and kings shall come out of thee." (2) All the territory of Canaan was once more declared to be the destined possession of his seed. Its limits, indeed, were not again defined with the same geographical minuteness as on the first formation of the covenant, but the tenure of the inheritance was made as enduring as words could make it: "I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession." (3) The third element in the Divine purpose with Abraham had up till this time been only vaguely pointed at as the "Blessing." It now assumed the shape of a thorough reconciliation betwixt the man and his Maker—such a covenant between the two as gives the man who is faithful to it a claim upon God, entitling him to count upon Him as in a special sense his God. Thus ran the wonderful words: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." There lay the heart and kernel of the whole.

¶ If there is a living God, faithful and true, let us hold His faithfulness. If there is an eternity of bliss, of reward for those who love Him—if He will verily withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly, let us "hold God's faithfulness," and walk worthy of Him. Holding His faithfulness, we may face with calm and sober but confident assurance of victory, every difficulty and

danger. We may count on grace for the work, on pecuniary aid, on needful facilities, and on ultimate success. Let us not give Him a partial trust, but daily, hourly serve Him, "holding God's faithfulness." How many Christians go mourning and lose joy, strength, and opportunities of helping others, because they do not hold God's faithfulness![1]

Thou hast given me a heart to desire,
Thou hast given me a soul to aspire,
A spirit to question and plead;
I ask not what Thou hast decreed;
I think but of love and of need;
Thou art rich, Thou art kind, Thou art free;
What joy shall be failing to me
Whom Thou lovest? Thy smile and Thy kiss
Can give me back all that I miss;
In Thy presence is fulness of bliss;
I ask not its nature! I know
It is life, it is youth, it is love;
It is all that is wanting below,
It is all that is waiting above.

Is it peace that I crave? Is it rest?
Is it love that would bless and be blest?
All, all that Thou takest away,
Thou canst give me again, in a day,
In an hour, in a moment! Thy hand
Is full, and I open my breast
For the flower of my soul to expand.[2]

III.

The Covenant.

It has been found necessary to introduce the covenant in speaking of the promises made by God to Abraham. But the covenant with its implications demands separate consideration, especially in connexion with its renewal, and with the signs attached to it—change of name and circumcision.

1. We appreciate the significance of a revelation in proportion as we understand the state of mind to which it is made. Abraham's

[1] *Hudson Taylor's Choice Sayings*, 28. [2] Dora Greenwell.

state of mind is disclosed in the exclamation: "Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee!" He had learned to love the bold, brilliant, domineering boy. He saw how the men liked to serve him and how proud they were of the young chief. No doubt his wild intractable ways often made his father anxious. Sarah was there to point out and exaggerate all his faults and to prognosticate mischief. But there he was, in actual flesh and blood, full of life and interest in everything, daily getting deeper into the affections of Abraham, who allowed and could not but allow his own life to revolve very much around the dashing, attractive lad. So the reminder that he was not the promised heir was not entirely welcome.

We are familiar with this state of mind. We wish God would leave us alone. We have found a very attractive substitute for what He promises, and we resent being reminded that our substitute is not, after all, the veritable, eternal, best possession. It satisfies our taste, our intellect, our ambition; it sets us on a level with other men and gives us a place in the world; but now and again we feel a void it does not fill. We have attained comfortable circumstances, success in our profession, our life has in it that which attracts applause and sheds a brilliance over it; and we do not like being told that this is not all. Our feeling is, Oh, that this might do! that this might be accepted as perfect attainment! it satisfies me (all but a little bit); might it not satisfy God? Why summon me again away from domestic happiness, intellectual enjoyment, agreeable occupations, to what really seems so unattainable as perfect fellowship with God in the fulfilment of His promise? Why spend all my life in waiting and seeking for high spiritual things when I have so much with which I can be moderately satisfied? For our complaint often is not that God gives so little but that He offers too much, more than we care to have: that He never will let us be content with anything short of what perfectly fulfils His perfect love and purpose.

¶ In setting aside the desire for the crowns and thrones of ambition, we must be very careful that we are not merely yielding to temptations of indolence, of fastidiousness, of cowardice, and calling a personal motive unworldliness for the sake of the associations. No man need set himself to seek great positions, but a man who is diffident, and possibly indolent, will do well to

pin himself down in a position of responsibility and influence, if it comes naturally in his way. There are a good many men with high natural gifts of an instinctive kind who are yet averse to using them diligently, who, indeed, from the very facility with which they exercise them, hardly know their value. Such men as these—and I have known several—undertake a great responsibility if they refuse to take advantage of obvious opportunities to use their gifts. Men of this kind have often a certain vague, poetical, and dreamy quality of mind; a contemplative gift. They see and exaggerate the difficulties and perils of posts of high responsibility. If they yield to temptations of temperament, they often become ineffective, dilettante, half-hearted natures, playing with life and speculating over it, instead of setting to work on a corner of the tangle. They hang spiritless upon the verge of the battle instead of mingling with the fray.[1]

2. This being Abraham's state of mind, he is aroused from it by the words: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect." I am the Almighty God, able to fulfil your highest hopes and accomplish for you the brightest ideal that My words ever set before you. There is no need of paring down the promise till it squares with human probabilities, no need of adopting some interpretation of it which may make it seem easier to fulfil, and no need of striving to fulfil it in any second-rate way. All possibility lies in this: I am the Almighty God. Walk before Me, and be thou perfect, therefore. Do not train your eye to earthly distances and earthly magnitudes and limit your hope accordingly, but live in the presence of the Almighty God.

Do not defer the advices to some other possible world; do not settle down at the low level of godless nature and of the men around you; do not give way to what you yourself know to be weakness and evidence of defeat; do not let self-indulgence take the place of My commandments, indolence supplant resolution, and the likelihoods of human calculation obliterate the hopes stirred by the Divine call: Be thou perfect. Is not this a summons that comes appropriately to every man? Whatever be our contentment, our attainments, our possessions, a new light is shed upon our condition when we measure it by God's idea and God's resources. Is my life God's ideal? Does that which satisfies me satisfy Him?

[1] A. C. Benson, *From a College Window*, 243.

¶ When you look up to God out of a state of probation or trial, you cannot but look upon Him as a Judge, and you cannot but fear an impartial judgment from Him. If you look to Him as from a state of education, you regard Him as a Father who has brought you into being with the one purpose of training you into a participation of His own righteousness and His own blessedness. If you see and feel that this object, namely, the participation in His righteousness and blessedness, is the object in existence the most desirable for you, then you will feel that God's purpose for you is exactly your own purpose for yourself, that you could not therefore be in better hands. This is the right condition of man's spirit in relation to God, the righteousness of faith, of perfect trust, perfect confidence.[1]

¶ There is a purpose in life. Man can live only by living in this purpose. If any man severs himself from it, he severs himself from life. He may continue to exist in the world for many years, but the vital spark in him will all the while be waning. So also with nations. They flourish or decay just in the measure in which they observe or disregard this purpose.[2]

3. The purpose of God's present appearance to Abraham was to renew the covenant, and this He does in terms so explicit, so pregnant, so magnificent that Abraham must have seen more distinctly than ever that he was called to play a very special part in God's providence. That kings should spring from him, a mere pastoral nomad in an alien country, could not suggest itself to Abraham as a likely thing to happen. Indeed, though a line of kings or two lines of kings did spring from him through Isaac, the terms of the prediction seem scarcely exhausted by that fulfilment. And accordingly St. Paul without hesitation or reserve transfers this prediction to a spiritual region, and is at pains to show that the many nations of whom Abraham was to be the father were not those who inherited his blood, his natural appearance, his language and earthly inheritance, but those who inherited his spiritual qualities and the heritage in God to which his faith gave him entrance. And he argues that no difference of race or disadvantages of worldly position can prevent any man from serving himself heir to Abraham, because the seed, to whom as well as to Abraham the promise was made, was Christ, and in

[1] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, i. 228.
[2] R. H. Hodgson, *Glad Tidings!* 14.

Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, but all are one.

(1) In connexion, then, with this covenant in which God promised that He would be a God to Abraham and to his seed, two points of interest to us emerge. First, that Christ is Abraham's heir. In His use of God's promise we see its full significance. In His lifelong appropriation of God we see what God meant when He said, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed." We find our Lord from the first living as one who felt His life encompassed by God, embraced and comprehended in that higher life which God lives through all and in all. His life was all and whole a life in God. He recognized what it is to have a God, one whose will is supreme and unerringly good, whose love is constant and eternal, who is the first and the last, beyond whom and from under whom we can never pass. He moved about in the world in so perfectly harmonious a correspondence with God, so merging Himself in God and His purpose and with so unhesitating a reliance upon Him, that He seemed and was but a manifestation of God, God's will embodied, God's child, God expressing Himself in human nature. He showed us once for all the blessedness of true dependence, fidelity, and faith. He showed us how that simple promise, "I will be a God to thee," received in faith, lifts the human life into fellowship with all that is hopeful and inspiring, with all that is purifying, with all that is real and abiding.

(2) But a second point is, that Jesus was the heir of Abraham not merely because He was his descendant, a Jew with all the advantages of the Jew, but because, like Abraham, He was full of faith. God was the atmosphere of His life. But He claimed God not because He was Jewish, but because He was human. Through the Jews God had made Himself known, but it was to what was human not to what was Jewish that He appealed. And it was as Son of Man not as son of Israel or of Adam that Jesus responded to God and lived with Him as His God. Not by specially Jewish rites did Jesus approach and rest in God, but by what is universal and human, by prayer to the Father, by loving obedience, by faith and submission.

¶ Why has God taken such pains to satisfy us that He has indeed loved and forgiven all men? Just in order that every

individual might see in God a perfect ground of confidence. Unless you know that God has forgiven you, and that He loves you, you cannot have any confidence in Him; and unless you have full confidence in Him, you cannot have peace with Him, you cannot open your heart to Him, you cannot love Him. It is the belief of His forgiving love to yourself which can alone open your heart to Him. This is the true meaning of the doctrine of personal assurance. It is not that God saves a man because he has an assurance of his own personal salvation, but that our hearts cannot open to God until we are satisfied that He loves ourselves with a forgiving love. Until we are satisfied of His love to us, we cannot love Him; and therefore we cannot obey Him, for there is no obedience without love.[1]

4. The question has been keenly discussed whether the covenant denotes a self-imposed obligation on the part of God, irrespective of any condition on the part of man, or a bilateral engagement involving reciprocal obligations between God and men. The truth seems to lie somewhat between two extremes. The covenant is neither a simple Divine promise to which no obligation on man's part is attached (as in xv. 18), nor is it a mutual contract in the sense that the failure of one party dissolves the relation. It is an immutable determination of God's purposes, which no unfaithfulness of man can invalidate; but it carries conditions, the neglect of which will exclude the individual from its benefits.

(1) On God's side there is the name of God: "I am God Almighty," a sufficient guarantee at all times. The name is *El Shaddai*, "God Almighty." God pledges His power that on His part the covenant will be kept. As regards the meaning of Shaddai, we are entirely in the dark: neither Hebrew nor any of the cognate Semitic languages offers any convincing explanation of it. But whatever be the etymology of the name, it is true that the choice of it does seem sometimes to be determined by the thought of the power of God, whether in the way of protection and blessing, or in the way of authority, punishment, or trial. We may therefore acquiesce, at least provisionally, in the now familiar rendering "Almighty."

(2) On man's side the demand is made: "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." To "walk before the face or presence of

[1] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, ii. 161.

God," meant to order his daily life and behaviour according to His will, so as to retain His friendly approval. To be "perfect" in this holy bond of amity meant to adhere to it with an undivided, unseduced loyalty, mingling his service of El Shaddai who had spoken to him, with no secret hankering after other divinities, and no unquiet misgivings as to the trustworthiness of Jehovah's word. Considering the stage of revelation at which Abraham stood, it covered all that an upright and sincere heart could feel to be incumbent on it in the sight of God, the heart-searching Judge of men.

¶ It is not enough to be merely passive under God's dealings. The spirit of entire submission is a great grace; but it is a still higher attainment to become flexible—that is to say, to move just as He would have us move. This state of mind might perhaps be termed the spirit of co-operation, or of Divine co-operation. In this state the will is not only subdued; but, what is very important, all tendency to a different or rebellious state is taken away. Of such a soul, which is described as the Temple of the Holy Ghost, God Himself is the inhabitant and the light.[1]

IV.

The Signs.

Two seals were at this time affixed to the covenant: the one for Abraham himself, the other for every one who shared with him in the blessings of the covenant.

1. The first consisted in the change of his own name to Abraham, "the father of a multitude," and of his wife's to Sarah, "princess," or "queen," because she was now announced as the destined mother of kings.

¶ The early Hebrews were not wont to name a child without considering the significance of the name; even when this was a family possession, its meaning did not escape the attention. But new names were continually formed to express special characteristics of the person, and the formation of the language owes much to the creation of personal names. Indeed, in the giving of the name, one of the aims was to express some outstand-

[1] Madame Guyon, in *Life* by T. C. Upham.

ing and particularly marked individuality. Personal names sometimes expressed the circumstances of the family when the child was born. Prophets gave to their children names which were living testimonies to the content of their utterances. But the general principle was to characterize the child's own individuality by the name bestowed. But among the Hebrews religious affairs and circumstances influenced much the formation of names, though the creation of names having as an element a Divine name is by no means confined to them, such formations being common among Arabs, and similar early Canaanite and Hebrew names are found, such as "Abimelech," "Abiezer." In the numerous cases in which a definite attribute of deity or some close relationship is expressed in the name, the idea intended is that of invocation of a blessing, and it is generally found that the mother has the most influence in the choice of the name. . . . In the earliest period the Divine name in most common use was the simple "El"—cf. "Israel," "Ishmael"—and this is true as well of the Arabs as of the Hebrews. Frequently the idea expressed is that of relationship, as when words indicating fatherhood, brotherhood, and the like are employed—the Semitic "ab," father, "ahi," brother, "ammi," uncle, and the like. From the time of Moses, with increasing frequency names were compounded with forms derived from the Divine name Yahweh. The formation of new names continued until post-Exilic times — a proof that the significance of these names remained a living factor in their application, though it is a fact that family names were often chosen which carried with them historic reminiscences. Among the Hebrews then was especially true the maxim, "nomina sunt omina," since to the Israelite the name was the expression of personality; were there disagreement between name and character, it was fitting to change the former. Indeed, a change of name under new circumstances was no novelty. Sometimes teachers gave to their disciples appellations which expressed the latters' spiritual peculiarities. Inasmuch as between the person and the name a living connexion existed, it was regarded as of great importance that the name be transmitted to posterity. . . . Going back to the fact that the name expressed the individuality is the frequent statement that God calls men by name; while sometimes "name" stands for "person." [1]

¶ The name "Ruskin" is of doubtful origin; and it matters little whether it is the same word as Erskine, or a mere nickname, Roughskin, or whether it is a diminutive, meaning the little red man. But it falls under the law which seems to assign to English

[1] C. von Orelli, in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, viii. 77.

men of genius quaint, striking, or beautiful names—and this is especially true of great writers; there is hardly a great English writer who has not borne a seemly name.[1]

¶ He had a curious dislike to the sound of his surname, and habitually took trouble to avoid using it, a weakness best explained by his own simile: "One man may walk into a beautiful house with the dust of the highway on his boots, quite unconscious of this; while to another it would be so disagreeable as to amount to its being a real pain." He had fancies about the inheritance of a name, and used to say when he heard of one that pleased his ear, "Ah, if I had had a name such as that, I should have done my work better."[2]

2. The change of name was special to Abraham and Sarah, the other seal was public. All who desired to partake with Abraham in the security, hope, and happiness of having God as their God were to submit to circumcision. This sign was to determine who were included in the covenant. By this outward mark encouragement and assurance of faith were to be quickened in the heart of all Abraham's descendants.

¶ Circumcision is not, as is sometimes supposed, a rite peculiar to the Jews. It was, and still is, widely practised in different parts of the world. In ancient times we hear of it especially as usual in Egypt, where indeed the monuments afford evidence that it was practised as early as the period of the 4th dynasty (3998–3721 B.C., Petrie), and whence Herodotus declares that the custom spread to the Ethiopians, the Phœnicians, and the "Syrians of Palestine" (*i.e.* the Jews). Jer. ix. 26 shows also that it was practised by the Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, and certain Arab tribes; indeed, from the fact of the Philistines being so pointedly referred to as "uncircumcised," it may be inferred that most of Israel's neighbours were circumcised like themselves.

In Israel, the two distinctive characteristics of circumcision are (1) its being performed in infancy; (2) the religious ideas associated with it. To take (2) first: the idea of membership in the nation is absorbed in that of consecration and dedication to Jehovah; the religious point of view supersedes the civil or political; circumcision becomes the external condition and seal of admission into the religious privileges of the nation—

[1] A. C. Benson, *Ruskin: A Study in Personality*, 8.
[2] *George Frederick Watts*, i. 3.

the first condition of membership in it, as a religious community. (1) The age was fixed at eight days. This was probably a consequence of (2): when the religious point of view superseded the secular or civil, it would be natural for the child to be dedicated as early as possible to the God who was to be his protector through life. At the same time a humanitarian motive may have co-operated; for the operation is much less serious when performed upon an infant than when performed upon one more or less grown up.

Thus circumcision, like sacrifice and other institutions of Israel's religion, was a rite common to Israel with other nations, but stamped in Israel with special associations and a special significance.[1]

¶ God has marked or stamped His people for His own treasure. A seal distinguishes the property of him whose it is; and so God has marked His people as His own peculiar property. Every seal is a mark, but every mark is not a seal. A seal secures property, as well as distinguishes it. If you want a thing to be secured so as not to be touched, you seal it. And so were God's people secured from apostasy and harm. They were stamped with the image and superscription of the King. No evil should befall them. The pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noonday, should not come nigh them. They would carry the lamp of their spiritual life, unquenched, to glory. Once in Christ, believers are always in Christ; they go on infallibly to glory. . . . How were men to know that they were sealed? Not by climbing into heaven, and searching the sealed book of God's elect there. How did they know this beautiful summer had come? Did God send an angel to blow a trumpet and announce it, or write it in golden letters on the blue firmament? No, they felt the warm breath of summer upon them; they saw the fruits and flowers of summer growing and ripening around them. So also they felt the warm breath of God's love dissolving their ice-bound hearts, and the flowers and fruits of God's grace springing up around them. They had thus the double evidence, in their character, of the feelings within and the fruits without. Sealing also meant consecration. As when they wrote a letter to a friend, they did not care to let every one through whose hands it passed know all that was in it, they sealed it; so God's children were secreted. The world knew them not. Under the mystery of love, and under the clods of the sepulchre, God sealed them, on till that day when the trump shall be blown, the seals opened, the treasures displayed. "Then, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day shall I make up my jewels."[2]

[1] S. R. Driver. [2] *Life of Robertson of Irvine* (by A. Guthrie), 132.

ABRAHAM.

VI.

The Heir.

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The Heir.

The Lord judge between me and thee.—Gen. xvi. 5.

In order to take the promises of God to Abraham together, we found it necessary to anticipate the history somewhat, especially in regard to the birth of Ishmael and of Isaac. Let us now return and follow the narrative of events in order.

I.

Ishmael.

1. The league of friendship which it had pleased the Most High to contract with Abraham was entered into with him not as a private individual, standing alone, but as the head and destined progenitor of a nation. Yet his marriage had been so long unblessed with issue that he had begun to entertain the idea of an adopted heir, in despair of one sprung from his own body. This idea was dissipated by a Divine communication which preceded the first formation of the covenant: "He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." These words left no doubt that Abraham should become a father; but they said nothing to indicate that Sarah was to be a mother.

Two passionate hearts under the grey tent dwelt ever on one thought: the mother's to clasp a son to her milky breast, dearest desire of all to an Oriental woman; the father's to found a mighty race, to be the father of nations, his personal desire merged in the larger thought of mankind. Year after year went by and no less keen was the longing. Deeper grief then gathered round it; and though Abraham believed still, Sarah despaired. At last she could wait no longer; she adopted the Oriental usage and gave her slave-girl to her husband.

¶ In the matter of Sarah giving her handmaid Hagar to Abraham as a second or inferior wife, because she had no children herself, it is not improbable that we have a record of what was a common custom at that time. In the inscriptions, however, the woman of inferior position, though she is expected to be the servant of the other, is raised, to all appearance, into a higher position, and described as the sister of the first wife, apparently by adoption. There was to be no difference in the status of the children of either of them, and it was apparently on account of the hope that Hagar's son would be as her own that the patriarch's wife acted as she did.[1]

2. As soon as the end was obtained, the results, like a crop of nettles, began to appear in that home, which had been the abode of purity and bliss, but which was now destined to be the scene of discord. Raised into a position of rivalry with Sarah, and expectant of giving the long-desired son to Abraham, and a young master to the camp, Hagar despised her childless mistress, and took no pains to conceal her contempt. This was more than Sarah could endure. It was easier to make one heroic act of self-sacrifice than to bear each day the insolent carriage of the maid whom she herself had exalted to this position. Nor was she reasonable in her irritation; instead of assuming the responsibility of having brought about the untoward event, so fraught with misery to herself, she passionately upbraided her husband, saying: "My wrong be upon thee: the Lord judge between me and thee."

In such an emergency as now arose in Abraham's household, character shows itself clearly. Sarah's vexation at the success of her own scheme, her recrimination and appeal for strange justice, her unjustifiable treatment of Hagar, Abraham's Bedouin disregard of the jealousies of the women's tent, his Gallio-like repudiation of judgment in such quarrels, his regretful vexation and shame that through such follies, mistakes, and wranglings, God had to find a channel for His promise to flow—all this discloses the painful ferment into which Abraham's household was thrown. Sarah's attempt to rid herself with a high hand of the consequences of her scheme is signally unsuccessful. She forces Hagar to flee, and fancies that she has now rid herself and her household of all the disagreeable consequences of her experiment.

[1] T. G. Pinches.

She is grievously mistaken. The slave comes back upon her hands, and comes back with the promise of a son who should be a continual trouble to all about him.

3. When Hagar fled from her mistress she naturally took the way to her old country. Instinctively her feet carried her to the land of her birth. And as she crossed the desert country where Palestine, Egypt, and Arabia meet, she halted by a fountain, spent with her flight and awed by the solitude and stillness of the desert. Her spirit is breaking under this sense of desolation, when suddenly her heart stands still, as she hears a voice utter her own name "Hagar, Sarai's maid." As readily as every other person when God speaks to them does Hagar recognize who it is that has followed her into this blank solitude. In her circumstances to hear the voice of God left no room for disobedience. The voice of God made audible through the actual circumstances of our daily life acquires a force and an authority we never attached to it otherwise.

One well-known and welcome fountain broke to the traveller of that age his monotonous march across the barren interval which divides the rolling pastures on the south-west of Hebron from the nearest green corner of Egypt. At this oasis on the route to Shur was the weary runaway reposing, when, in the childlike phrase of the old Book, "the angel of the Lord found her." It is the first time we encounter this solemn title, which afterwards recurs so often, not only in the Pentateuch, but in the prophets of the Old Testament, and the early narratives of the New. Whether, under every appearance which bears this name of "the messenger of Jehovah," we ought to understand a real theophany or manifestation of the eternal Word and Son of God, clothed by anticipation with such a human form as He was destined ultimately to assume into personal union with Himself; or only some angelic creature, of more than usual dignity, commissioned to represent for the occasion the majesty of the Godhead, and therefore entitled to speak and act with delegated authority on the Divine name—this long-disputed question is one on which it is impossible to pronounce with confidence.

¶ The *angel of Jehovah* is a self-manifestation of Jehovah: he identifies himself with Him (xxxi. 13, cf. 11; Ex. iii. 6, cf. 2),

speaks and acts with His authority (Gen. xvi. 10, xxi. 19, cf. xvii., xviii., xxii. 12, 15 f.), and is spoken of as *God* or *Jehovah* by others (Gen. xvi. 13, xlviii. 15 f.; Judg. vi. 14, cf. 12, xiii. 21 f.; Hos. xii. 4, 5). On the other hand, he is also distinguished from Jehovah (Gen. xvi. 11, xix. 13, 21, 24; Num. xxii. 31): "the mere manifestation of Jehovah creating a distinction between the angel and Jehovah, though the identity remains. The form of manifestation is, so to speak, something unreal (Deut. iv. 12, 15), a condescension for the purpose of assuring those to whom it is granted that Jehovah in His fulness is present with them. As the manifestation called the angel of Jehovah occurred chiefly in redemptive history, older theologians regarded it as an adumbration or premonition of the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. This idea was just, in so far as the angel was a manifestation of Jehovah on the earth in a human form, and in so far as such temporary manifestations might seem the prelude to a permanent redemptive self-revelation in this form (Mal. iii. 1, 2); but it was to go beyond the Old Testament, or at any rate beyond the understanding of Old Testament writers, to found on the manifestation distinctions in the Godhead. The only distinction implied is that between Jehovah and Jehovah in manifestation."[1]

4. "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will greatly multiply thy seed, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son; and thou shalt call his name Ishmael, because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he shall be as a wild-ass among men; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Gen. xvi. 9–12).

In the promise of a son which was here given to Hagar and the prediction concerning his destiny, while there was enough to teach both her and Abraham that he was not to be the heir of the promise, there was also much to gratify a mother's pride and be to Hagar a source of continual satisfaction. The son was to bear a name which should commemorate God's remembrance of her in her desolation. As often as she murmured it over the babe or called it to the child or uttered it in sharp remonstrance

[1] S. R. Driver.

to the refractory boy, she was still reminded that she had a helper in God who had heard and would hear her.

¶ The prediction regarding the child has been strikingly fulfilled in his descendants, the three characteristics by which they are distinguished being precisely those here mentioned. "He will be a wild man," literally, "a wild-ass among men," reminding us of the description of this animal in Job: "Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing." Like the zebra that cannot be domesticated, the Arab scorns the comforts of civilized life, and adheres to the primitive dress, food, and mode of life, delighting in the sensation of freedom, scouring the deserts, sufficient with his horse and spear for every emergency. His hand is also against every man, looking on all as his natural enemies or as his natural prey; in continual feud of tribe against tribe and of the whole race against all of different blood and different customs. And yet he "dwells in the presence of his brethren"; though so warlike a temper would bode his destruction and has certainly destroyed other races, this Ishmaelite stock continues in its own lands with an uninterrupted history. In the words of an authoritative writer: "They have roved like the moving sands of their deserts; but their race has been rooted while the individual wandered. That race has neither been dissipated by conquest, nor lost by migration, nor confounded with the blood of other countries. They have continued to dwell in the presence of all their brethren, a distinct nation, wearing upon the whole the same features and aspects which prophecy first impressed upon them."[1]

II.

Ishmael and Isaac.

And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and moreover I will give thee a son of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her.—Gen. xvii. 15, 16.

1. At last Sarah is definitely named as the mother of the promised heir. When the announcement was made to Abraham

[1] Marcus Dods.

he fell upon his face, outwardly worshipping, but in his heart he laughed. His feelings were mixed; he desired to believe, yet his mind at once turned to the great natural improbability of the event predicted. These natural feelings found a muffled expression in the spoken words: "O that Ishmael might live before thee!"

This slightly unbelieving petition is rebuked only in so far as the repetition of the promise can be called a rebuke. "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac"—a name which would at all times remind Abraham of the even ludicrously unlikely means by which this child was brought into the world. At the same time his prayer for Ishmael was heard, though not precisely as he expected: "twelve princes shall he beget (ch. xxv. 12–16), and I will make him a great nation"—a promise which has received abundant fulfilment in the extraordinary career of the Arab conquerors of the seventh and following centuries.

¶ One hundred years after Mohammed's death his followers were masters of an empire greater than Rome at the zenith of her power. They were building mosques in China, in Spain, in Persia, and in Southern India! The extent, the rapidity, and the method of the early Moslem conquest are a marvellous illustration of their fanatic zeal. Two hundred years after the Hegira, Mohammed's name was proclaimed on thousands of minarets from the pillars of Hercules to the Pacific, and from Northern Turkestan to Ceylon. Only thirteen centuries have passed, and to-day there are over two hundred and thirty million Mohammedans—one-seventh of the population of the globe! Fifty-eight millions in Africa, sixty-two millions in India, thirty millions in China, thirty-five millions in the Malay Archipelago, and one quarter of a million in the Philippines, not to speak of the lands that are almost wholly Mohammedan in Western Asia. It is easy enough to say that Mohammedanism was propagated by the sword. It largely was. But we may well ask, with Carlyle: "Where did Mohammed get his sword?" What fires of faith and devotion must have burned in the hearts of the early champions of Islam, to make them gird the sword and fight and die for the new religion. It swept across Syria, Egypt, Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers, Morocco, like the desert simoon—swift, fierce, impetuous, irresistible, destructive—only to be curbed and cooled by the waves of the Atlantic. History tells of Akba, one of their leaders, that he rode his horse far out into the surf and cried: "Great God! if I were not stopped by this raging sea, I would go

on to the nations of the West, preaching the unity of Thy name and putting to the sword those who would not submit."[1]

2. In the birth of Isaac, Abraham at length sees the long-delayed fulfilment of the promise. But his trials are by no means over. He has himself introduced into his family the seeds of discord and disturbance, and speedily the fruit is borne. Ishmael, at the birth of Isaac, was a lad of fourteen years, and reckoning from Eastern customs, he must have been over sixteen when the feast was made in honour of the weaned child. Certainly he was quite old enough to understand the important and not very welcome alteration in his prospects which the birth of this new son effected. He had been brought up to count himself the heir of all the wealth and influence of Abraham. There was no alienation of feeling between father and son: no shadow had flitted over the bright prospect of the boy as he grew up; when suddenly and unexpectedly there was interposed between him and his expectation the effectual barrier of this child of Sarah's. The importance of this child to the family was in due course indicated in many ways offensive to Ishmael; and when the feast was made, his spleen could no longer be repressed. This weaning was the first step in the direction of an independent existence, and this would be the point of the feast in celebration. The child was no longer a mere part of the mother, but an individual, a member of the family. The hopes of the parents were carried forward to the time when he should be quite independent of them.

The too visible pride of the aged mother, the incongruity of maternal duties with ninety years, the concentration of attention and honours on so small an object — all this was, doubtless, a temptation to a boy who had probably at no time too much reverence. But the words and gestures which others might have disregarded as childish frolic, or, at worst, as the unseemly and ill-natured impertinence of a boy who knew no better, stung Sarah, and left in her blood a poison that infuriated her. "Cast out this bondwoman and her son," she demanded of Abraham.

¶ "I know the king [George IV.] so well," added the Duke of Wellington, "that I can deal with him easily, but anybody who

[1] S. M. Zwemer, *Islam*, 55.

does not know him, and who is afraid of him, would have the greatest difficulty in getting on with him. One extraordinary peculiarity about him is, that the only thing he fears is ridicule. He is afraid of nothing which is hazardous, perilous, or uncertain; on the contrary, he is all for braving difficulties; but he dreads ridicule, and this is the reason why the Duke of Cumberland, whose sarcasms he dreads, has such power over him, and Lord Anglesey likewise; both of them he hates in proportion as he fears them."[1]

¶ We must not be too much afraid of ridicule, but at the same time we must not be too ready to give occasion for it. This has been emphatically—too emphatically—expressed by Lord Chesterfield, "There is nothing that a young fellow, at his first appearance in the world, has more reason to dread, and consequently, should take more pains to avoid, than having any ridicule fixed upon him. It degrades him with the most reasonable part of mankind, but it ruins him with the rest; and I have known many a man undone by acquiring a ridiculous nickname. Vices and crimes excite hatred and reproach; failings, weaknesses, and awkwardnesses excite ridicule; they are laid hold of by mimics, who, though very contemptible wretches themselves, often by their buffoonery fix ridicule upon their betters. The little defects in manners, elocution, address, and air (and even of figure, though very unjustly) are the objects of ridicule and the causes of nicknames. Therefore take great care to put it out of the power of ridicule to give you any ridiculous epithets; for, if you get one, it will stick to you like the envenomed shirt."[2]

3. Both for Abraham and for Ishmael it was better that this severance should take place. It was grievous to Abraham; and Sarah saw that for this very reason it was necessary. Ishmael was his firstborn, and for many years had received the whole of his parental affection; and, looking on the little Isaac, he might feel the desirableness of keeping another son in reserve, lest this strangely-given child might as strangely pass away. Coming to him in a way so unusual, and having perhaps in his appearance some indication of his peculiar birth, he might seem scarcely fit for the rough life Abraham himself had led. On the other hand, it was plain that in Ishmael were the very qualities which Isaac was already showing that he lacked.

[1] *The Greville Memoirs*, i. 223.
[2] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son*, . 273.

The act of expulsion was itself unaccountably harsh. There was nothing to prevent Abraham sending the boy and his mother under an escort to some safe place; nothing to prevent him giving the lad some share of his possessions sufficient to provide for him. Nothing of this kind was done. The woman and the boy were simply put to the door; and this, although Ishmael had for years been counted Abraham's heir, and though he was a member of the covenant made with Abraham. There may have been some law giving Sarah absolute power over her maid; but if any law gave her power to do what was now done, it was a thoroughly barbarous one, and she was a barbarous woman who used it.

¶ How many soever you may find or fancy your faults to be there are only two that are of real consequence—Idleness and Cruelty. Perhaps you may be proud. Well, we can get much good out of pride, if only it be not religious. Perhaps you may be vain; it is highly probable; and very pleasant for the people who like to praise you. Perhaps you are a little envious; that is really very shocking; but then—so is everybody else. Perhaps, also, you are a little malicious, which I am truly concerned to hear, but should probably only the more, if I knew you, enjoy your conversation. But whatever else you may be, you must not be useless, and you must not be cruel. If there is any one point which, in six thousand years of thinking about right and wrong, wise and good men have agreed upon, or successively by experience discovered, it is that God dislikes idle and cruel people more than any others:—that His first order is, "Work while you have light"; and His second, "Be merciful while you have mercy."

I said, you are not to be cruel. Perhaps you think there is no chance of your being so; and indeed I hope it is not likely that you should be deliberately unkind to any creature; but unless you are deliberately kind to every creature, you will often be cruel to many. Cruel, partly through want of imagination (a far rarer and weaker faculty in women than men), and yet more, at the present day, through the subtle encouragement of your selfishness by the religious doctrine that all which we now suppose to be evil will be brought to a good end; doctrine practically issuing, not in less earnest efforts that the immediate unpleasantness may be averted from ourselves, but in our remaining satisfied in the contemplation of its ultimate objects, when it is inflicted on others.[1]

[1] Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, § 7 (*Works*, xviii. 36).

4. The Egyptian and her boy passed into the desert, and soon the merciless heat of the noonday sun blazed thirst and death on the sand and stony hills, dotted with arid shrubs and bitter flowers. Winding through this desolation, the weeping figures went their way. Sorrow makes weariness and pain; the water was spent in the bottle, for a mother cannot resist her child's cry. At last the boy could go no farther, and Hagar lost all hope. Despairing surrender to fate when effort has reached a certain point—that is in the Oriental character. An Englishwoman would have struggled onward till she died, to save the lad. But Hagar laid the child in the shadow of one of the shrubs, and "sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she lift up her voice, and wept."

That is beautiful. And it goes on with equal beauty. "And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer."

¶ The tale is told with Oriental imagery. Voices are heard; an angel speaks from heaven. But if we do not impute objective reality to these things, the spiritual humanity of the story is none the less. It came home to Hagar's heart that God had not forgotten her, that He was the ever near. And that is a revelation which has come to thousands of men and women in this world of ours. It has come home to us who worship the Father who holds us, in our hours of trouble, to His heart; and we think, as we give thanks, of the wandering woman in the desert, and realize our brotherhood with her—that everlasting fraternity of sorrow and of joy that knits us, across the centuries, to all mankind.[1]

5. No longer the voice said: "Return, submit"; for Hagar had learnt that lesson. Her character, strengthened by the submission, was fit to do her work in liberty. Besides, she had

[1] Stopford A. Brooke.

her boy, and his fate was to be great. Her motherhood had the fine duty of making him worthy of his destiny. And moreover, she knew within her that this was the work of God, and she loved Him for it. Wherever she looked, whatever she did, she saw the Divine Master of life, the All-seeing, whom she had met in her first exile to rebuke her and to command the right; the Ever-near, whom she had met in her second flight to comfort and to strengthen her; and, seeing Him, life became Divine, being filled with the consciousness of love. So the Oriental heart was at peace at last. And with peace, forgiveness and loving-kindness crept in. The families were reconciled. Ishmael and Isaac often met, and at last stood together round their father Abraham's grave. The education of Hagar was complete. The story is rounded to its close in charity.

¶ The things we think the bitterest are often the sweetest at their core. Had Hagar remained in Abraham's tents, her life would have grown into greater misery. Sarah, now exultant, would have made her feel her slavery in a thousand ways her passionate heart could not have borne. She might have worn herself out with indignation, or sunk into apathy; her eager heart grown grey within, all the interests of life decayed into a withered common-place; the slave might have become a slave in heart. So God removed her and made her the free woman of the desert. The stain of slavery slipped away from her for ever. She became her own. Her soul drank the fresh air of a new life. Every hour her interests grew and multiplied. Her whole character expanded, and she thanked the Lord in joy.[1]

6. St. Paul uses this incident in order to represent the impossibility of law and gospel living harmoniously together. Hagar, the slave, who may even have been born in the Sinaitic Desert, with which she seems to have been so familiar, is a fit representative of the spirit of legalism and bondage, seeking to win life by the observance of the law, which was given from those hoary cliffs. Hagar is the covenant of Mount Sinai in Arabia, "which gendereth to bondage," and "is in bondage with her children" (Gal. iv. 24, 25). Sarah, the free woman, on the other hand, represents the covenant of free grace. Her children are love, and faith, and hope; they are not bound by the spirit of

[1] Stopford A. Brooke.

"must," but by the promptings of spontaneous gratitude; their home is not in the frowning clefts of Sinai, but in Jerusalem above, which is free, and is the mother of us all. Now, argues the Apostle, there was no room for Hagar and Sarah, with their respective children, in Abraham's tent. If Ishmael was there, it was because Isaac was not born. But as soon as Isaac came in, Ishmael had to go out. So the two principles—of legalism, which insists on the performance of the outward rite of circumcision; and of faith, which accepts the finished work of the Saviour—cannot co-exist in one heart. It is a moral impossibility. As well could darkness co-exist with light and slavery with freedom. So, addressing the Galatian converts, who were being tempted by Judaizing teachers to mingle legalism and faith, the Apostle bade them follow the example of Abraham, and cast out the spirit of bondage which keeps the soul in one perpetual agony of unrest.

Paul would have each of us apply, allegorically, the words "Cast out this bondwoman and her son," that is, cast out the legal mode of earning a standing in God's house, and with this legal mode cast out all the self-seeking, the servile fear of God, the self-righteousness, and the hard-heartedness it engenders. Cast out wholly from yourself the spirit of the slave, and cherish the spirit of the son and heir. Nothing but being the child of God, being born of the Spirit, can give the feeling of intimacy, confidence, unity of interest, which constitutes true religion.

¶ Have you often thought of how the whole Bible is a Book of Liberty, of how it rings with liberty from beginning to end, of how the great men are the men of liberty, of how in the Old Testament, the great picture which for ever shines is the emancipator, leading forth out of imprisonment the people of God who were to do the great work of God in the very much larger and freer life in which they were to live? The prophet, the psalmist, are ever preaching and singing about liberty, the enfranchisement of the life of man, that man was not imprisoned in order to fulfil himself, but shall open his life, and every new progress shall be into a new region of existence which he has not touched as yet. When we turn from the Old Testament to the New Testament, how absolutely clear that idea is! Christ is the very embodiment of human liberty. In His own personal life and in everything that He did and said, He was for ever uttering the great gospel that man, in order to become his completest, must

become his freest, that what a man did when he entered into a new life was to open a new region in which new powers were to find their exercise, in which he was to be able to be and do things which he could not be and do in more restricted life. It is the acceptance of that idea, it seems to me, that makes us true disciples of Christ and of that great gospel, and that transfigures everything.[1]

Phew! 'T 'is a stuffy and a stupid place,
This social edifice by Custom wrought—
This fenced enclosure wherein all are caught,
The great and small, the noble and the base,
And squeezed and flattened to one common face.
Air, air for springing fancy, errant thought!
Scope to make something of the seeming nought!
Room for the fleet foot and the open race!

Break out, O brother, braver than the rest,
Lover of Liberty, whose arm is strong!
Buttress our independence with thy breast,
And fight a passage through the stagnant throng.
Many will press behind thee, but they need
The stalwart captain, not afraid to leap.[2]

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Addresses*, 80.
[2] Ada Cambridge, *The Hand in the Dark* (1913), 110.

ABRAHAM.

VII.

Sodom and Gomorrah.

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Sodom and Gomorrah.

Forget not to shew love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.—Heb. xiii. 2.

The story of the destruction of the Cities of the Plain, told in the 18th and 19th chapters of Genesis, is, says Driver, "one of the most graphically and finely written narratives in the Old Testament. Except in xix. 29 (P), the author is throughout J, whose characteristics — ease and picturesqueness of style, grace and delicacy of expression, and naïve anthropomorphisms—it conspicuously displays. Abraham is attractively depicted; he is dignified, courteous, high-minded, generous, a man whom accordingly God deems worthy of His confidence, visiting him as one friend visits another, bestowing upon him promises, and disclosing to him His purposes: a strong contrast to the weak and timid Lot, and still more so to the profligate inhabitants of the Cities of the Plain."

The narrative appears at first sight to be based on vague recollection of an actual occurrence—the destruction of a group of cities situated in what is now the Dead Sea, under circumstances which suggested a direct interposition of Divine power. It seems unreasonable to suppose that a legend so firmly rooted in Hebrew tradition, so full of local colour and preserving so tenaciously the names of the ruined cities, should be destitute of historic foundation; and to doubt whether any such cities as Sodom and Gomorrah ever existed in the Dead Sea basin appears an unduly sceptical exercise of critical judgment. It has been shown, moreover, that a catastrophe corresponding in its main features to the Biblical description is an extremely probable result of volcanic and other forces, acting under the peculiar geological conditions which obtain in the Dead Sea depression.

¶ The present ruins of Ghuweir doubtless date from a time at least two thousand years after the days of Abraham and Lot.

One work of man, however, may go back to the period of the Patriarchs, and may have played a part in the Biblical narrative. Near the head of the valley which leads eastward from Ghuweir up toward the plateau of Moab we discovered a carefully excavated cave among the mountains at a place called El Ghuttar, between Abu Hassan and Beth Peor. The cave is about twenty feet long and fifteen wide, carefully hewed out of the limestone above a spring. Two windows look down the wadi toward Zoar. A door with a rock-cut trough to lead off rain water is so located that it can be reached only by climbing a precipice by means of six or eight little niches cut in the rock, or by climbing down over some difficult steps in the cliff above. Nowhere else in this region is there known to be an artificial cave upon which any such care has been bestowed as upon this. The discovery of the cave supplements the volcano and the tradition of Suweimeh in supplying all the elements of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in exactly the location where the Biblical account would lead one to expect them.[1]

I.

The Visit of the Angels.

1. During the scorching heat and glaring light of noon, while the birds seek the densest foliage and the wild animals lie panting in the thicket, and everything is still and silent as midnight, Abraham sits in his tent door under the spreading oak of Mamre. Listless, languid, and dreamy as he is, he is at once aroused into brightest wakefulness by the sudden apparition of three strangers. Remarkable as their appearance no doubt must have been, it would seem that Abraham did not recognize the rank of his visitors; it was, as the writer to the Hebrews says, "unawares" that he entertained angels. But when he saw them stand as if inviting invitation to rest, he treated them as hospitality required him to treat any wayfarers. He sprang to his feet, ran and bowed himself to the ground, and begged them to rest and eat with him.

The whole scene is primitive and Oriental, and presents a perfect picture of the manner in which a modern Bedouin Sheikh receives travellers arriving at his encampment; the hasty baking of bread, the celebration of a guest's arrival by the killing of animal food, not on other occasions used even by large flock-masters; the

[1] E. Huntington, *Palestine and its Transformation*, 196.

meal spread in the open air, the black tents of the encampment stretching back among the oaks of Mamre, every available space filled with sheep, asses, camels—the whole is one of those clear pictures which only the simplicity of primitive life can produce.

¶ The description presents a perfect picture of the manner in which a modern Bedawee sheykh receives travellers arriving at his encampment. He immediately orders his wife or women to make bread; slaughters a sheep or some other animal and dresses it in haste; and bringing milk and any other provisions that he may have ready at hand, with the bread, and the meat which he has dressed, sets them before his guests. If these be persons of high rank, he stands by them while they eat.[1]

2. Later writers saw in the scene a picture of the beauty and reward of hospitality. It is very true, indeed, that the circumstances of a wandering pastoral life are peculiarly favourable to the cultivation of this grace. Travellers, being the only bringers of tidings, are greeted from a selfish desire to hear news as well as from better motives. Life in tents, too, of necessity makes men freer in their manners. They have no door to lock, no inner rooms to retire to, their life is spent outside, and their character naturally inclines to frankness and freedom from the suspicions, fears, and restraints of city life. Especially is hospitality accounted the indispensable virtue, and a breach of it as culpable as a breach of the Sixth Commandment, because to refuse hospitality is in many regions equivalent to subjecting a wayfarer to dangers and hardships under which he is almost certain to succumb.

> "This tent is mine," said Yussouf, "but no more
> Than it is God's; come in, and be at peace;
> Freely shalt thou partake of all my store,
> As I of His who buildeth over these
> Our tents His glorious roof of night and day,
> And at whose door none ever yet heard Nay."

¶ East differs from West; but courtesy and loving-kindness are the same under all guises. True welcome never consisted in meats and drinks, but in the affection of the heart. Love can make a little gift excel. The sympathy which feels for others' need, the kindness which is happy in serving, the modesty which says little and does much, the open house and heart and mind—these are some of the elements of hospitality. But this grace

[1] E. W. Lane, *The Modern Egyptians*, i. 364.

cannot be analysed. "There is," as Washington Irving says, "an emanation from the heart in genuine hospitality which cannot be described, but is immediately felt." Abraham and Sarah found that the rewards of hospitality are spiritual. It brings a blessing to the giver as well as the receiver, and some who show love to strangers entertain angels unawares. The hosts and hostesses of the Bible, generous and philanthropic souls who did not squander the gifts of God on sinful pleasures, nor hoard them for selfish ends, but delighted to spend them in doing good—Abraham and Sarah, Rebekah and Abigail, the women of Sarepta and Shulem, and like them the sisters of Bethany, Lydia, and Prisca, and Gaius—found that their kindness came back to them an hundredfold in the hallowing memories and heavenly influences which lingered in their homes, and in the joy of the diviner life to which they were called and stimulated by the messengers of God.[1]

3. There is no doubt as to the august character of one of the three who, on that memorable afternoon, when every living thing was seeking shelter during the heat of the day, visited the tent of the patriarch. In the first verse we are expressly told that Jehovah appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. And in the tenth verse there is the accent of Deity, who alone can create life, and to whom nothing is too hard, in the words of promise which tell how certainly Sarah should have a son. And, besides, we are told that two angels came to Sodom at even. Evidently they were two of the three who had sat as Abraham's guests beneath the tree which sheltered his tent in the blazing noon. But as for the other, who throughout the wondrous hours had been the only spokesman, His dignity is disclosed in the amazing colloquy which took place on the heights of Mamre, when Abraham stood yet before the Lord, and pleaded with Him as the Judge of all the earth.

If it is asked why God adopted this exceptional method of manifesting Himself to Abraham, not as on other occasions in vision or by word, but eating with him as his guest, the only apparent reason is that He meant this also to be the test applied to Sodom. There, too, His angels were to appear as wayfarers dependent on the hospitality of the town, and by the people's treatment of the unknown visitors their own moral state was detected and judged. The contrast between the peaceful after-

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 109.

noon with Abraham and the diabolic night in Sodom is full of significance.

¶ It was believed in the Middle Ages that when a saint was doing Christ's work among the poor, often the form of the outcast was in a moment transfigured; and the visitor received his reward, for he found himself in the presence of his Lord. A friend once said to Dr. John Duncan that he did not feel Christ to be with him, and that he would like to get nearer Him. "Yonder He is," said the Professor, "seeking the lost. Go there, and you will find Him."[1]

¶ The real measure of the religious spirit in a man is not, as so many mediæval teachers believed, absorption in devotion and continual consciousness of sin; it is rather the keenness and completeness of one's consciousness of the presence of God in all things, and of the revelation of God through all things. One often meets devout people whose sense of the presence of God seems to be almost entirely historic; they believe that God was with Moses and with the Israelites in their wanderings, and that over those wayward children and over their confused and painful journeyings a Divine purpose presided; but in the world of to-day they see on every side the evidences of the activity of an evil spirit, and only here and there the evidences of a Divine order and control of affairs. Carlyle, whose historic imagination was masterful, expressed passionately in his last years the longing that God would speak again! He could hear the Divine voice speaking in the accents of Knox, Luther, and Cromwell; he could not hear it in the tones of Maurice, Stanley, or Bright. It seemed to him as if God had vanished out of human history when the rugged soul of Cromwell took its flight. There are hosts of devout people who believe in a past God, but who have very slight hold on faith in a present God. Older peoples seem to them to have been divinely led, their own people to stumble on blindly and in a helpless confusion of aims and ideals; other ages seem to them to have been sacred, this age seems devoid of Divine recognition.[2]

II.

Abraham's Intercession.

Jehovah communicated to Abraham His purpose of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. This disclosure to Abraham of His

[1] J. Wells, *The Life of James Hood Wilson*, 94.
[2] H. W. Mabie, *The Life of the Spirit*, 10.

secret counsel is a singular mark of Jehovah's regard for him, based upon the unique position which Abraham holds, partly as the depository of a blessing for all nations, partly as having been chosen by God to found a house whose members should all study to follow after righteousness, so that it might well be of importance for the difference between God's treatment of righteousness and unrighteousness to be clearly apprehended. The disclosure, moreover, affords occasion for a signal illustration both of the noble and generous impulses by which Abraham is actuated, and of the value in God's eyes of righteousness and of His readiness to pardon, if only He can do so consistently with justice.

1. Two distinct reasons are given why Jehovah communicated to Abraham His purpose concerning the Cities of the Plain.

(1) The first reason is: "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" In other words, Abraham was to be the means of blessing all other nations, and account must therefore be given to him when any people is summarily removed beyond the possibility of receiving this blessing. If he was to be a blessing to any nation it must surely be to those who were within an afternoon's walk of his encampment and among whom his nephew had taken up his abode. Suppose he had not been told, but had risen next morning and seen the dense cloud of smoke overhanging the doomed cities, might he not with some justice have complained that although God had spoken to him the previous day, not one word of this great catastrophe had been breathed to him.

(2) The second reason is expressed in the nineteenth verse. God had chosen Abraham that he might command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment that the Lord might fulfil His promise to Abraham. That is to say, as it was only by obedience and righteousness that Abraham and his seed were to continue in God's favour, it was fair that they should be encouraged to do so by seeing the fruits of unrighteousness; so that as the Dead Sea lay throughout their whole history on their borders, reminding them of the wages of sin, they might never fail rightly to interpret its meaning, and in every great catastrophe to read the lesson

"except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." They could never attribute to chance this predicted judgment. And in point of fact frequent and solemn reference was made to this standing monument of the fruit of sin.

2. The patriarch's keen sense of justice recoils at the thought of the innocent perishing with the guilty, and this by the decree of an all-righteous Judge. The vision of Lot, who, though thoughtless, was not steeped in guilt, rises before him; others, not less righteous, might be there likewise; he is moved to compassion, and takes upon himself to intercede. With the greatest diffidence and humility he prefers his petition: emboldened by success, he repeats it, until at length he receives the gracious assurance that the presence of ten righteous men in Sodom shall save the city. And so the truth is established that the God of justice is also a God of mercy. The passage is a striking witness to the deeply planted human instinct which requires justice in God — an instinct which frequently finds expression in the Old Testament, notably so in Job's passionate protests against His apparent injustice.

The keynote of Abraham's wonderful prayer for the five towns is not mercy, but justice. It is, in truth, hardly an intercession, so much as an expostulation. The speaker seems quite to realize that the time was over for forbearance and the pity that spares; the time for inquisition, and the judicial reckoning which follows it, had come. No doubt, in that mixture of noble motives out of which alone he could draw such courage to plead, one powerful element must have been a humane compassion for the fate of his neighbours and countrymen, as well as a kinsman's special love for the endangered family of Lot. But his words betray a deeper feeling. Beneath these considerations there lay a godly concern that the Divine name, dishonoured by the idolatrous tribes around, should display itself as undeniably just even in retribution. At any rate, the basis of his pleading was simply this, that possibly the moral foulness of these towns, though widespread enough, might not prove to be quite universal; and that, if only a small minority of the population had kept itself clean, it was inconsistent with the impartiality of God to confound good with bad in one indiscriminate act of punishment. Even this argument

he ventures to urge only with such expressions of profound reverence and diffidence as become a mortal who dares to reason with his Maker.

> How loth was righteous Abraham to cease,
> To beat the price of lustfull Sodom's peace!
> Marke how his holy boldnesse intercepts
> God's Justice; Brings His Mercy downe, by steps:
> He dare not bid so few as Ten, at first;
> Not yet from Fifty righteous persons, durst
> His Zeale on sudden make too great a fall,
> Although he wisht salvation to them all.
> Great God: Thy dying Son has pow'r to cleare
> A world of Sinnes, that one shall not appeare
> Before Thine angry eyes. What wonder then,
> To see Thee fall, from Fifty downe to Ten![1]

3. What are the elements in this remarkable intercession?

(1) It was *lonely* prayer.—He waited till on all that wide plateau, and beneath those arching skies, there was no living man to overhear this marvellous outpouring of a soul overcharged, as are the pools, when, after the rains of spring, they overflow their banks. When it is said that "he stood before the Lord," it is evidently meant that he was alone in the presence of Jehovah.

It is fatal to all the intensest, strongest devotion to pray always in the presence of another, even the dearest. Every saint must have a closet, of which he can shut the door, and in which he can pray to the Father which is in secret. The oratory may be the mountains, or the woods, or the sounding shore; but it must be somewhere. Pitiable is the man who cannot—miserable the man who dare not—meet God face to face, and talk with Him of His ways, and plead for his fellows.

> For what are men better than sheep or goats
> That nourish a blind life within the brain,
> If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
> Both for themselves and those who call them friend?

¶ Dr. Kidd's grandson, Mr. Henry Oswald, afterwards one of the magistrates of Aberdeen, who, when a boy, was for some time resident in the minister's house, has left amongst his papers a

[1] Francis Quarles, *Divine Fancies*, i. 69.

most vivid account of the impression made upon his mind by Dr. Kidd's heroic devotion to duty in the early morn: "In the darkness of a cold winter morning I have once and again heard him rising while the rest of the household was hushed in slumber. I listened while he patiently lit his fire, not with the ready help of lucifer matches, but with flint and steel eliciting a spark (how little we moderns prize our luxuries!); then he began to breathe out his soul in the most earnest tones at the throne of grace; the utterances of his devout heart were not audible to me, who was in an adjoining room, but, youngster as I was, I felt awed as I heard the sound of prayer that often became wrestling, and I knew that the man I revered was doing business with God."[1]

(2) The prayer was *persevering*. Six times Abraham returned to the charge, and as each petition was granted, his faith and courage grew; and, finding he had struck a right vein, he worked it again, and yet again. It looks at first sight as if he forced God back from point to point, and wrung his petitions from an unwilling hand. But this is a mistake. In point of fact, God was drawing him on; and if he had dared to ask at first what he asked at the last, he would have got more than all that he asked or thought at the very commencement of his intercession. This was the time of his education. He did not learn the vast extent of God's righteousness and mercy all at once; he climbed the dizzy heights step by step; and as he gained each step he was inspired to dare another.

It is so that God educates us still. In ever-widening circles, He tempts his new-fledged eaglets to try the sustaining elasticity of the air. He forces us to ask one thing, and then another, and yet another. And when we have asked our utmost, there are always unexplored remainders behind; and He does exceeding abundantly above all. There were not ten righteous men in Sodom; but Lot and his wife, and his two daughters, were saved, though three of them were deeply infected with the moral contagion of the place. And God's righteousness was clearly established and vindicated in the eyes of the surrounding peoples.

¶ My mother, when she had a large family of children gathered around her, made a covenant with three neighbours, three mothers. They would meet once a week to pray for the salvation of their children until all their children were converted

[1] J. Stark, *Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen*, 128.

—this incident was not known until after my mother's death, the covenant then being revealed by one of the survivors. We used to say: "Mother, where are you going?" and she would say, "I am just going out for a little while; going over to the neighbours." They kept on in that covenant until all their families were brought into the Kingdom of God, myself the last, and I trace that line of results back to an evening many years before, when my grandmother commended our family to Christ, the tide of influence going on until this hour, and it will never cease.[1]

(3) It was *humble* prayer. Throughout the interview, the humility of Abraham is quite as remarkable as his courage. He is but "dust and ashes." Once and again, as he presses his plea a step farther after each concession gained, does he deprecate the Divine displeasure against such perseverance. With all this humility, however, there is no hesitation whatever about the terms in which the argument itself is stated. It may be presumptuous in a man to remonstrate with his Judge at all; but there can be no presumption in counting upon the rectitude of the Judge. Without misgiving, therefore, does this simple-hearted man address God in these terms: "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

The nearer we get to God, the more conscious are we of our own unworthiness; just as the higher a bird flies in mid-heaven, the deeper will be the reflection of its snowy pinions in the placid mere beneath. Let the glowworm vie with the meridian sun; let the dewdrop boast itself against the fulness of the ocean bed; let the babe vaunt its knowledge with the intelligence of a seraph—before the man who lives in touch with God shall think of taking any other position than that of lowliest humiliation and prostration in His presence. Before Him angels veil their faces, and the heavens are not clean in His sight. And is it not remarkable that our sense of weakness is one of our strongest claims and arguments with God? "He forgetteth not the cry of the humble." "To that man will I look who trembleth."

¶ Some time ago I was watching the flicker, almost invisible, of a tiny night-light, when one of the Sisters drew near, and, lighting her candle in the dying flame, passed it round to light

[1] *The Autobiography of Dr. Talmage*, 5.

all those of the Community. "Who dare glory in his own good works?" I reflected. "From one faint spark such as this, it would be possible to set the whole earth on fire." We often think we receive graces and are divinely illumined by means of brilliant candles. But from whence comes their light? From the prayers, perhaps, of some humble, hidden soul, whose inward shining is not apparent to human eyes; a soul of unrecognized virtue and, in her own sight, of little value—a dying flame.[1]

III.

Lot's Escape.

1. In the deep recess which is found at either side of the gateway of an Eastern city, Lot had taken his accustomed seat. Wearied and vexed with the din of the revellers in the street, and oppressed with the sultry doom-laden atmosphere, he was looking out towards the cool and peaceful hills, purple with the sinking sun behind them, and letting his thoughts first follow and then outrun his eye; he was now picturing and longing for the unseen tents of Abraham, and almost hearing the cattle lowing round at evening and all the old sounds his youth had made familiar. He is recalled to the actual present by the footfall of the two men, and, little knowing the significance of his act, he invites them to spend the night under his roof.

2. Lot's character is a singularly mixed one. With all his selfishness, he was hospitable and public-spirited. Lover of good living, as undoubtedly he was, his courage and strength of character are yet unmistakable. His sitting at the gate in the evening to offer hospitality may fairly be taken as an indication of his desire to screen the wickedness of his townsmen, and also to shield the stranger from their brutality. From the style in which the mob addressed him, it is obvious that he had made himself offensive by interfering to prevent wrong-doing. He was nicknamed "the Censor," and his eye was felt to carry condemnation. It is true there is no evidence that his opposition had been of the slightest avail. How could it avail with men who knew perfectly well that, with all his denunciation of their wicked ways, he pre-

[1] *Sœur Thérèse of Lisieux* (1913), 232.

ferred their money-making company to the desolation of the hills, where he would be vexed with no "filthy conversation," but would also find no markets? Still it is to Lot's credit that in such a city, with none to observe, none to applaud, and none to second him, he should have been able to preserve his own purity of life, and steadily to resist wrong-doing. It would be cynical to say that he cultivated austerity and renounced popular vices as a salve to a conscience wounded by his own greed.

That he had the courage which lies at the root of strength of character became apparent as the last dark night of Sodom wore on. To go out among a profligate, lawless mob, wild with passion and infuriated by opposition—to go out and shut the door behind him—was an act of true courage. His confidence in the influence he had gained in the town cannot have blinded him to the temper of the raging crowd at his door. To defend his unknown guests he put himself in a position in which men have frequently lost life.[1]

3. The rescue of Lot occupied the brief interval between the earliest dawn and the rising of the sun. The moment of sunrise was the moment of judgment on the condemned towns. What reasons can we give which justify this act of destruction?

(1) It was a warning to others. It is true that the visitation, if it temporarily alarmed the nations of the immediate neighbourhood, did not prevent them from reaching a similar excess of immorality some centuries later, or from incurring at the edge of Joshua's sword the doom which heaven's fire had executed on their neighbours in the Jordan plain. Still, God's warnings have a merciful intention, even where they are unheeded; and this Sodom catastrophe has been well said to belong to that class of terrors in which a wise man will trace "the lovingkindness of the Lord."

(2) In this terrible act the Almighty simply hastened the result of the inhabitants' own actions. Nations are not destroyed until they are rotten at the core; as the north-east wind which snaps the forest trees only hastens the result for which the borer-worm had already prepared. It would have been clear to any thoughtful observer who had ventured out after dark in Sodom that it must inevitably fall. Unnatural crime had already eaten out the

[1] Marcus Dods.

national heart, and, in the ordinary course of events, utter collapse could not be long delayed.

(3) Besides, this overthrow happened only after careful investigation. "I will go down now and see." Beneath these simple words we catch a glimpse of one of the most sacred principles of Divine action. God does not act hastily, or upon hearsay evidence; He must see for Himself if there may not be some mitigating or extenuating circumstance. It was only after He had come to the fig-tree for many years, seeking fruit in vain, that He said, "Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?" And this deliberation is characteristic of God. He is unwilling that any should perish. He is slow to anger. Judgment is His strange work. He tells us that some day, when we come to look into His doings, we shall be comforted concerning many of the evils which He has brought on the world, because we shall know that He has not done without cause all that He has done (Ezek. xiv. 23).

¶ No other event in early history has left such deep traces upon the language and traditions of the world as the catastrophe which in Abraham's days overthrew the towns of the Lower Jordan. In some twenty passages scattered over Scripture from the Pentateuch to the Apocalypse, this is referred to by name as the most conspicuous instance of Divine vengeance upon sin. The very word used by the Hebrews to describe it, which our Version renders "overthrow," and which St. Peter translates by "catastrophe," is almost reserved for this special use; and what is still more curious, its equivalent is said to recur in the same sense in the Arabic Koran till it becomes quite a proper term for the unfortunate cities. Sodom's very name is "the overthrown." Nor is it Oriental peoples only who have gazed with horror on this "example" of vengeance. The Roman Tacitus describes the region of perpetual burning in language similar to that of the Jew Josephus, or the Christian St. Peter. Neither the suddenness of that destruction, nor its completeness, nor even the miraculous incidents which attended it, might have availed to preserve through so many centuries the impression which it made upon the primitive world, had not its visible effects (the *vestigia* of the Latin historian) remained from that day to this as a witness to successive generations how the wickedness of man had once worn out the long-suffering of God.[1]

[1] J. O. Dykes.

IV.

Lot's Wife.

1. Of Lot's wife the end is recorded in a curt and summary fashion. "His wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." The angel, knowing how closely on the heels of the fugitives the storm would press, had urgently enjoined haste, saying, "Look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain." Rapid in its pursuit as a prairie fire, it was only the swift who could escape it. To pause was to be lost. The command, "Look not behind thee," was not given because the scene was too awful to behold; for what men can endure, men may behold, and Abraham looked upon it from the hill above. It was given simply from the necessity of the case and from no less practical and more arbitrary reason. Accordingly, when the command was neglected, the consequence was felt.

2. Why the infatuated woman looked back one can only conjecture. The woeful sounds behind her, the roar of the flame and of Jordan driven back, the crash of falling houses and the last forlorn cry of the doomed cities, all the confused and terrific din that filled her ear, may well have paralysed her and almost compelled her to turn. But the use our Lord makes of her example shows us that He ascribed her turning to a different motive. He uses her as a warning to those who seek to save out of the destruction more than they have time to save, and so lose all. "He which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife." It would seem, then, as if our Lord ascribed her tragic fate to her reluctance to abandon her household stuff. She was a wife after Lot's own heart.

¶ At the S.W. end of the Dead Sea is the singular formation called the Jebel Usdum, the "mountain of Sodom," a range of cliffs 5 m. long, and 600 ft. high, consisting of crystallized rock-salt, —once part of the bed of the ancient Salt Sea,—"covered with a capping of chalky limestone and gypsum. It has a strangely dislocated, shattered appearance; and from the face of it great

fragments are occasionally detached by the action of the rains, and appear as 'pillars of salt' advanced in front of the general mass" (Smith, *DB.* iii. 1180). Such pillars, or pinnacles, have often been noticed by travellers; and it is probable that one, conspicuous in antiquity, gave rise to the belief expressed in the present verse. Writers of a later age often felt satisfied that they could identify the pillar referred to; but during the rainy season such pillars are constantly in process of formation and destruction, so that it is doubtful how far any particular one would be permanent.[1]

[1] S. R. Driver.

ABRAHAM.

VIII.

Abimelech.

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ABIMELECH.

And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the land of the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.—Gen. xx. 1, 2.

1. ALTHOUGH the oaks of Mamre and the cave of Machpelah rendered Hebron the permanent seat of the patriarchs beyond any spot in Palestine, and although they are always henceforth described as lingering around this green and fertile vale, there is yet another circle of recollections more in accordance with their ancient pastoral habits. Even at the moment of the purchase of the sepulchre, Abraham represents himself as still "a stranger and a sojourner in the land"; and as such his haunts were elsewhere. He "journeyed from thence toward the land of the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar."

2. Gerar remains to this day an undiscovered site. At that time it formed the capital of a Philistine people whose five subdivisions at a later period occupied the Shephelah, or strip of level land along the southern coasts, whence they waged with Israel an incessant border warfare. To that coast strip they lent their own name of Philistia or Palestine, which in much later times came to be inaccurately extended to the whole land. The name probably implies that they had entered the country as immigrants, expelling or absorbing an earlier nomadic race of Avim. At first the conquerors were themselves nomads; but the pastoral life which they retained in Abraham's age, and which led them to affect the frontier pastures of the South-land, had been exchanged before Joshua's invasion for settled habits, a common polity, a league of coast towns, and considerable advancement in military, commercial, and industrial pursuits. As yet they were

a simple clan of shepherds, few in number, and far from formidable; most unlike their warlike descendants, who broke the power of Israel in the disastrous fight at Aphek, and crushed the house of Saul on the fatal field of Gilboa.

The official title borne by their successive chieftains was Abimelech. Abraham's visit to the territory of this petty "king" led to the formation of friendly ties, which lasted at least through the son's lifetime, and which contrast pleasantly with the hereditary feud whose ceaseless forays and reprisals were for generations to embroil their descendants.

I.

The Sin of Abimelech.

Thou art but a dead man.—Gen. xx. 3.

1. In connexion with the stay in Gerar an incident is recorded of Abraham which (if it is to be regarded as historically distinct from and not a variant of the narrative already told of his visit to Egypt, and again told of Isaac) seems almost incredible. The narrative records that Abraham repeated to the prince of Gerar the same disingenuous story about his wife for which he had been rebuked some twenty years before in Egypt, and that a second time, and of set purpose, Sarah passed as no more than his sister.

¶ In general outline the narrative is very similar to that of xii. 10–20 (Abram and Sarai in Egypt), and xxvi. 6–11 (Isaac and Rebekah at Gerar). The repetition is remarkable, especially as in each case the excuse is the same, that the wife is a sister. It is difficult to avoid suspecting that the three narratives are variations of the same fundamental theme, a story told popularly of the patriarchs and attributed sometimes to different occasions in the life of Abraham, and once also to an occasion in the life of Isaac.[1]

2. Taking the narrative as it stands, one is forced to conclude that to Abraham's mind the stratagem still appeared to be excusable in self-defence. Perhaps even now it would wear the same complexion in the eyes of most Orientals. To speak the truth for

[1] S. R. Driver.

the truth's sake is one of the very latest of virtues, and in no Eastern race has it ever come to blossom. But, assuming that the unveracity of the trick did not shock the patriarch's conscience, how could he be blind to its impolicy? As on the earlier occasion so again the natural result was certain to ensue. In that age, as in more recent times, Oriental princes assumed the right to collect into their harem, not always from sensual desire, but quite as often for reasons of dignity, females of distinction who were not already under the shield of marriage. He must have known that he was exposing his wife to such a risk. But to expose her to it at the very moment when he was expecting her within a year to become the mother of a God-given heir, argued either an astounding thoughtlessness or a no less astounding presumption. Either he acted with a disregard of probable consequences most unlike the gravity of his character, or he ventured to presume in a culpable degree on a second interposition of God. One thing, however, is certain, that Abraham sought to escape unpleasant consequences at the cost of his own self-esteem.

¶ John Lawrence was nothing if he was not truthful; he was transparent as the day, and my highest aim has been to render to so "heroically simple" a character that homage which is its due—the homage of unalloyed truth. . . . He always said . . . exactly what he thought. He always acted . . . exactly as he spoke.[1]

¶ When last in Edinburgh, Scott had given his friend William Burn, architect, directions to prepare at his expense a modest monument for the grave of Helen Walker, the original of Jeanie Deans, in the churchyard of Irongray. Mr. Burn now informed him that the little pillar was in readiness, and on the 18th October Sir Walter sent him this beautiful inscription for it:—

"This stone was erected by the Author of Waverley to the memory of Helen Walker, who died in the year of God, 1791. This humble individual practised in real life the virtues with which fiction has invested the imaginary character of Jeanie Deans; refusing the slightest departure from veracity, even to save the life of a sister, she nevertheless showed her kindness and fortitude in rescuing her from the severity of the law, at the expense of personal exertions which the time rendered as difficult

[1] Bosworth Smith, *Life of Lord Lawrence.*

as the motive was laudable. Respect the grave of poverty when combined with love of truth and dear affection."[1]

Me let the world disparage and despise—
The world, that hugs its soul-corroding chains,
The world, that spends for such ignoble gains.
Let foe or bigot wrap my name in lies;
Let Justice, blind and maimed and halt, chastise
The rebel-spirit surging in my veins;
Let the Law deal me penalties and pains;
Let me be outcast in my neighbours' eyes,

But let me fall not in my own esteem,
By poor deceit or petty greed debased;
Let me be clean from undetected shame;
Know myself true, though heretic I seem;
Know myself faithful, howsoe'er disgraced;
Upright and strong, for all the load of blame.[2]

3. In contrast with the patriarch's duplicity, one gets from the sequel of this incident a pleasing impression of the manners of the early Philistines, and the personal nobility of their chief. With Pharaoh on an earlier occasion God had dealt only through the indirect agency of events, which Pharaoh was left to interpret as he could. On Abimelech's house also a plague was sent. But the Divine interpretation of that plague was conveyed to him through a dream, and that under no disguise of parable, but in plain words as from God. Dreams form a channel for communications from Heaven which Scripture commonly represents as employed in the case of persons who, though not prophets, are yet worshippers of God. The impression to be gathered from this narrative certainly is, that the Philistine sheikh recognized the true God and feared Him. His "integrity" of heart is acknowledged by the Divine Voice. His horror at the sin into which he had well-nigh been betrayed is expressed in language which leaves nothing to be desired. With a praiseworthy care for his people, he warns them also against similar errors. Whatever can be done to compensate for his involuntary wrong, he eagerly does.

[1] J. G. Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, ch. lxxxi.
[2] Ada Cambridge, *The Hand in the Dark* (1913), 119.

¶ Notice that in the warning addressed to Abimelech sin is treated as not wholly an affair of the conscience and inward motive, but an external fact—a violation of the objective moral order, which works out its consequences with the indifference of a law of nature to the mental condition of the transgressor (cf. the matricide of Orestes, etc.). At the same time God Himself recognizes the relative validity of Abimelech's plea of ignorance. It is the first faint protest of the moral sense against the hereditary mechanical notion of guilt. But it is a long way from Abimelech's faltering protestation of innocence to Job's unflinching assertion of the right of the individual conscience against the decree of an unjust fate.[1]

¶ It is intensely difficult to indicate the mischief of involuntary and modest ignorance, calamitous only in measure; fruitful in its lower field, yet sorrowfully condemned to that lower field—not by sin, but fate.[2]

¶ "Negligences and ignorances"—how often these weigh down our sorrowful, our well-nigh despairing spirits! Against wilful sin long years of struggling fealty may have taught us to watch; but then, while we have gone gaily forward, eager and unafraid, a little duty has not even been guessed, a little kindness left undone, and "inasmuch as ye did it not" has filled the wide earth and air with the thunder of its judgment. "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless,"—ah, sorrowful heart, take comfort!—"nevertheless I am continually with thee. Thou hast holden me by my right hand," and since I have no wisdom, Thou wilt give me Thine, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me"—"to glory?" No, I would not ask for that, but just receive me where, being with Thee, I cannot again mistake, or forget—or fail. This "Nevertheless" I carry in my bosom, an eternal Amulet of Hope.[3]

4. Abimelech is warned that the sin he is about to commit is the more serious because Abraham is a "prophet." What ideas he attached to that venerable title of "prophet" we cannot tell, but the title itself was evidently familiar to him, and commanded his respect. He bowed at once, and cheerfully, to the intimation it conveyed, that his visitor was one who stood nearer God than other men, and enjoyed the special guardianship of Heaven.

[1] John Skinner, *Genesis*, 317.

[2] John Ruskin, *Ariadne Florentina*, § 154 (*Works*, xxii. 399).

[3] *Thoughts of a Tertiary*.

¶ The term *nabi* for a prophet is the oldest and most frequent of all, and is found in all the Semitic languages. It is, according to Ewald, from an independent root which has the meaning "to make clear." Among the Arabians, *nabi* is "the speaker." The primary meaning of the Hebrew word is, then, to be a clear speaker, or, in the passive form, to speak for another. "As the dumb man requires his messenger or interpreter to speak for him, so does the voice of God, dumb to the throng of men, require some one to utter it." The Hebrew used the reflexive forms, *niphal* and *hithpael*, as the Romans expressed the same class of conceptions by the deponent verbs *loqui, fari, vociferari, concionari, vaticinari.* The conception that the prophet does not speak his own thoughts but those which he has received from God, is, then, inseparably connected with his title. Thus Aaron is said to be given to Moses as his "prophet" (Ex. vii. 1), or "mouth," as he is elsewhere designated (iv. 16); because he is to speak for Moses as an ambassador or interpreter speaks for his superior. Nor is this germinal idea wanting in the wider use of the word when it is applied to Abraham (Gen. xx. 7) as one in friendly communion with God; for this patriarch here receives the title "as the God-addressed or inspired, because the inward speaking or inspiration of God constitutes the essence of prophecy."[1]

5. The thing that is most remarkable in the whole story is that God should apparently have taken Abraham's part instead of humbling and punishing him in the sight of the heathen. To us the Almighty seems to have had just cause for contracting Abraham into Abram, and sending him back into his own country "a sadder but a wiser man." In discussing a subject so delicate we must awaken the attention of our whole mind and heart; for the loss of a word may be the loss of a truth.

(1) Observe, first of all, that if the Divine purpose is to be turned aside by the fault or blemish found in individual character, the Divine government of man is at an end, and human progress is an impossibility. Adam failed, so did Noah, so did Abraham, so did Lot. So clearly was it established as a sad and mournful truth that no individual man was perfect, that once and again God was moved to abolish the human race from the earth altogether. It was not Adam that sinned, or Noah, or Abraham; it was *human nature* that sinned. There seems to be a little advantage of one man over another in this or that particular, but

[1] G. T. Ladd, *The Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*, 125.

the advantage even when real is only partial. Pharaoh seemed to be a better man than Abraham, but he was not so in reality. Take them bulk for bulk, character for character, Pharaoh was not to be mentioned with Abraham. Esau seemed to be a brave and noble son of the soil, and Jacob seemed to be a sneaking and vile schemer, with the making of an assassin under his smooth skin; but the judgment is not to be fixed at any one point; you must take the full stretch of time required by the Almighty in working out His purposes, and then it will be seen that under all appearances there was something undiscernible by the human eye which made every man chosen to leadership and renown in the holy kingdom the best man that could have been chosen for the purpose. You say that Abimelech was better than Abraham; now let me ask you what you know about Abimelech? Nothing but what is stated in this chapter. Very well. You are so far right. You have seen Abimelech at his best and you have seen Abraham at his worst, and then you have rushed to a conclusion.

¶ The springs of human character lie beyond the reach of outward observation. External action is but an inadequate and often deceptive measure of inward spiritual capacity. What a man does or has done, or within the limits of our brief and bounded life can ever accomplish, is but an imperfect and often blurred and confused expression of the hidden potentialities of the spirit. Of that which constitutes the essence and reality of a human soul an outward observer may easily form a mistaken, *can* only form a partial and inadequate estimate. Only to an eye which penetrates to the root of character, which can embrace in its judgment the unrealized and boundless possibilities of the future as well as truly interpret the meaning of the past, only to an eye which measures life, not by action merely, but by the principles from which action springs and the inexhaustible productive force that is in them—only to such an eye does the true complexion and character of a human soul lie open.[1]

¶ In entering the narrow channel of the Bermudas, the pilot stands not at the helm, but at the bows, looking down into the deep water, clear as crystal, to see the coral reef above which, or rather through which, he is threading his dangerous way. Sometimes there is scarcely twice the ship's own breadth between point and point; yet between those he must go, cannot pause, and ten feet divergence on either side would be shipwreck. He

[1] John Caird, *University Sermons*, 116.

may do his work very awkwardly, and even be conscious of great mistakes; but with the most perfect humility he may utterly disclaim the power of any one standing on the shore to judge his seamanship, who is looking along a smooth, level surface, instead of looking down upon a bed of rocks that lie beneath the surface. No wonder that his tacks, and turns, zigzag eccentricities of course are perfectly unintelligible. "I would have steered direct to that point." "Yes, my good friend, but did you see the rock? and if not, what can you know about the matter? Come up here, and then give me an opinion if you can." Now, the pilot who is up there is not a wiser man than the other, but he has got a different point of view, and from that point he defies all human judgment, until you go and sit beside him.[1]

(2) In the next place let us consider, knowing human nature as we do, how beneficial a thing it was to the great men themselves to be shown now and again that they were imperfect, and that they were only great and strong as they were good, as they were true to God. To be an illustrious leader, to have power and authority amongst men, always to be in high places, and to be absolutely without a fault of disposition, temper, or desire, is enough to tempt any man to think he is more than a man; and even to be without actual social fault that can be pointed out and blamed is not unlikely to give a man a false notion of the real state of his own nature.

¶ We may learn quite as much from our failures as from our successes. I have seen more truly what I am by my faults than by my graces, and never have I prayed with so glowing a fervour as when I have seen that there is but a step between me and death and that I have nearly taken it.[2]

¶ We need to beware of what we call success. The men who live in the region of easy successes never come to much. They match themselves against small things. It is in encountering the great things, where failures are so plentiful, that we come to our best. You aimed at the moon and hit a tree. Well, the endeavour was worth while, and perhaps you hit something besides the tree. It is often the invisible hits that count. The outside mark is untouched, but if you have made bull's-eyes in the region of fortitude, of patience, of industry, of self-mastery, the scoring has not been bad. When Madame de Chantal declares "there is something in me that has never been satisfied,"

[1] *Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson*, 170. [2] Joseph Parker.

she is striking a note of failure that really means success. It means that we are made for such high things that the lower, however largely they bulk, do not enter in the calculation.[1]

Even our failures are a prophecy,
Even our yearnings and our bitter tears
After that fair and true we cannot grasp;
As patriots who seem to die in vain
Make liberty more sacred by their pangs.

Presentiment of better things on earth
Sweeps in with every force that stirs our souls
To admiration, self-renouncing love,
Or thoughts, like light, that bind the world in one:
Sweeps like the sense of vastness, when at night
We hear the roll and dash of waves that break
Nearer and nearer with the rushing tide,
Which rises to the level of the cliff
Because the wide Atlantic rolls behind,
Throbbing respondent to the far-off orbs.[2]

II.

The Compact with Abimelech.

And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.—Gen. xxi. 33.

1. A short time after Abraham's removal from the immediate neighbourhood of Gerar, Abimelech, in consideration of the stranger's power and influence, thought it expedient to conclude an alliance with him. It was not merely the natural desire to be on terms of friendship with a prosperous man that prompted this league; nor was it merely a private agreement of social confidence and respect; it was a formal tribal treaty, entered into with customary ceremony, and confirmed by the presence of the chief men of the country. Abimelech brings with him Phicol, the vizier or commander-in-chief, as witness of the transaction. The special occasion for the meeting arose from one of those disputes concerning water which are so common among the denizens of the desert. Then a formal treaty was struck between

[1] J. Brierley, *Life and the Ideal*, 266. [2] George Eliot, *A Minor Prophet.*

the two parties, "and Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God."

2. We are now far away from the hills of Judæa, in the wide upland valley, or rather undulating plain, sprinkled with shrubs, and with the wild flowers which indicate the transition from the pastures of Palestine to the desert,—marked also by the ancient wells, dug far into the rocky soil, and bearing on their stone or marble margins the traces of the long ages during which the water has been drawn up from their deep recesses. Such are those near the western extremity of the plain, still bearing in their name their identification with "the well of the oath," or "the well of 'the Seven'"—Beersheba,—which formed the last point reached by the patriarchs, the last centre of their wandering flocks and herds; and, in after times, from being thus the last inhabited spot on the edge of the desert became the southern frontier of their descendants. This southernmost sanctuary marks the importance which, in the migratory life of the East, was and is always attached to the possession of water. Here the solemn covenant was made, according to the significant Arab forms, of placing the seven lambs by themselves, between Abraham and the only chief of those regions who could dispute his right, the neighbouring king of the Philistines or Avites. "And Abraham," still faithful to the practice which he had followed in Canaan itself, "planted there a grove,"—not now of ilex or terebinth, which never descend into those wild plains, but the light feathery tamarisk, the first and the last tree which the traveller sees in his passage through the desert, and thus the appropriate growth of this spot. Beneath this grove and beside these wells his tents were pitched, and "he called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God."

¶ Of all names in Palestine there are hardly any better known than Beersheba. Nothing could more aptly illustrate the defencelessness of these southern slopes of Judah than that this site which marked the frontier of the land was neither a fortress nor a gateway, but a cluster of wells in the open desert. But, like Dan, at the other end of the land, Beersheba was a sanctuary. These two facts—its physical use to their flocks, its holiness to themselves—are strangely intermingled in the stories of the patriarchs,

whose herdsmen strove for its waters; who themselves plant a tamarisk, and call on the name of Jehovah, the Everlasting God. The two great narratives of the Pentateuch differ in describing the origin of Beersheba. The one imputes it to Abraham, the other, in very similar circumstances, to Isaac. The meaning of the name as it stands might either be the Well of Seven or the Well of (the) Oath, and in one passage both etymologies seem to be struggling for decision, though the latter prevails. There are seven wells there now, and to the north, on the hills that bound the valley, are scattered ruins nearly three miles in circumference.[1]

¶ It was the same wilderness into which Ishmael had gone forth and become an archer, and where he was to be made a great nation. It is as though the strong Bedouin (shall we add the strong parental?) instinct had, in his declining days, sprung up again in the aged patriarch—as if the unconquerable aversion to the neighbourhood of walls and cities, or the desire to meet once more with the firstborn son who recalled to him his own early days, drew him down from the hills of Judæa into the congenial desert. At any rate, in Beersheba, we are told he sojourned "as a stranger" many days. In Beersheba Rebekah was received by his son Isaac into Sarah's vacant tent; and in the wilderness, as it would seem, "he gave up the ghost and died in a good old age," in the arms of his two sons,—Isaac, the gentle herdsman and child of promise; Ishmael, the Arabian archer, untamable as the wild ass of the desert,—"and they buried him in the cave of Machpelah."[2]

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 284.
[2] Dean Stanley.

ABRAHAM.

IX.

Abraham's Great Trial.

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Abraham's Great Trial.

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold, the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son: so they went both of them together.—Gen. xxii. 7, 8.

The only incident in Abraham's life expressly characterized as a "trial" of his faith is the one here narrated, where the patriarch proves his readiness to offer up his only son as a sacrifice at the command of God. The story, which is the literary masterpiece of the Elohistic collection, is told with exquisite simplicity; every sentence vibrates with restrained emotion, which shows how fully the author realizes the tragic horror of the situation.

1. Isaac had now grown to be a lad when Abraham received from God a command regarding him. The boy is his only son, yet he is told to offer him to God in sacrifice. Obedient and devoted, he makes the necessary preparations, and betakes himself to the appointed place of sacrifice, resolved to satisfy even this extreme demand. His hand is raised to slay his son when he hears the Divine voice, clear and distinct, saying that God does not desire the completion of the sacrifice, but is satisfied with the proved willingness of the patriarch to surrender even his dearest to Him. The animal which is to be substituted in his son's place stands there ready by Divine Providence, and is sacrificed for him. The reward of his perfected obedience and faith is a solemn renewal of all the Divine promises hitherto given him. The spot where this all took place was Moriah. Three results follow: (1) Abraham's faith is triumphantly established in the face of the most severe test of all; (2) his son is a second time granted to his faith, and preserved as the foundation-stone

in the building of the Church of God; (3) above all, in contradistinction to Canaanite practice, the knowledge that God does not desire human sacrifices is acquired and secured for all time to come.

2. How old Isaac was at the time of this sacrifice there is no means of accurately ascertaining. He was probably in the vigour of early manhood. He was able to take his share in the work of cutting wood for the burnt offering and carrying the faggots a considerable distance. It was necessary, too, that this sacrifice should be made on Isaac's part, not with the timorous shrinking or ignorant boldness of a boy, but with the full comprehension and deliberate consent of maturer years. It is probable that Abraham was already preparing, if not to yield to Isaac the family headship, yet to introduce him to a share in the responsibilities he had so long borne alone. From the touching confidence in one another which this incident exhibits, a light is reflected on the fond intercourse of former years. Isaac was at that time of life when a son is closest to a father, mature but not independent; when all that a father can do has been done, but while as yet the son has not passed away into a life of his own.

¶ Ruskin told me that the exquisite tenderness between fathers and sons delighted him above all things in Virgil, and led one to the root of the main source of Roman greatness in its noblest time.[1]

I.

Temptation.

God did tempt (R.V. "prove") Abraham.—Gen. xxii. 1.

1. The word "tempt" which is found here in the Authorized Version is now misleading. For to tempt has, in modern English, acquired the sense of provoking or enticing a person in order that he may act in a particular way, but the Hebrew here is a neutral word, and means to test or prove a person, to see whether he will act in a particular way (Ex. xvi. 4; Judg. ii. 22, iii. 4), or whether the character he bears is well established (1 Kings x. 1). God

[1] Octavia Hill, in *Life* by C. E. Maurice (1913), 250.

thus proves a person, or puts him to the test, to see if his fidelity or affection is sincere; and men test, or prove, Jehovah when they act as if doubting whether His promise be true, or whether He is faithful to His revealed character. The Authorized Version, in the former application, uses always "prove," except in this passage, which (on account of the change in the meaning of "tempt") is rightly in the Revised Version altered to "prove"; in the latter application it uses always "tempt," which does not at all express to modern readers the meaning of the Hebrew, and would have been far better altered in the Revised Version to "put to the test (or proof)."

¶ When God tempts a man, it can be only for the one purpose which God has in all He does. In all His dealings with men He aims exclusively at bringing them nearer to Himself, at drawing them more deeply into His love, that He may pour out upon them more abundantly the riches of His grace. That this may be possible, they must be empty of self; they must part with self, and must do this afresh at every stage of life. Only the heart that loves God beyond all else can fully taste of His love. When God, then, lays heavy trials upon men, His first purpose is thus to make evident to them their own inward condition. Next He would bring them to an entire decision for Himself, and an inexorable separation from all that stands between themselves and God. Then He will Himself bestow upon the sincere, *i.e.* upon those who first of all love and seek Him, the strength for such a decision.[1]

2. God *proved* Abraham—tested his faith. It was to test whether Abraham really held fast the conviction which broke out in his intercessions for Sodom and Gomorrah,—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Was Abraham really sure that God was Supreme, and that the highest duty and blessedness of man lay in obeying Him? Was Abraham certain—absolutely certain—that God would be true to His promise that by Abraham's descendants through Isaac all nations would be blessed? Was he certain that God would be true to it, even though Isaac were offered as a sacrifice on the altar?

Abraham was asked, in effect, two questions. He was asked whether he absolutely resigned himself to the Lord's ownership. He was asked also whether he absolutely trusted his Owner's

[1] O. Funcke, *The World of Faith and the Everyday World*, 267.

truth and love. The two questions were not identical, but they were closely intertwined. And the response of Abraham to both questions, by the grace of God in his heart, was a glorious "Yes," an "Amen" which sounds on for ever through all the generations of the followers of the faith of Abraham. He so acted as to say, in effect: "I am Thine, and all mine is Thine, utterly and for ever." And this he did, not as merely submitting in stern silence to the inevitable, but "in faith." He was quite sure that He was faithful who had promised. He was sure of this because he was sure of God's character; because he knew Him and loved Him. So he overcame; so he received the crown; so he was blessed himself, and became a blessing to the world.

3. The ways in which God tests whether we really acknowledge Him as supreme are many and varied. The great tests, no doubt, come seldom. They are the memorable moments of life, the turning-points, the crises, in which we are judged—judged not finally, but with a judgment that often extends over many years, and has a large effect for good or evil on our whole subsequent history. The test is sometimes in secret, and how we have borne it is known only to God and ourselves; we have stood it, and are greatly the stronger for it, but we win no human honour; we have horribly failed, and shall suffer for it for years, but we incur no open disgrace. Sometimes the test is imposed in a form that reveals us to others as well as to ourselves—ruins us or makes us.

But these great crises come rarely; the way in which we meet them is largely determined by the way in which we stand tests of a more ordinary kind; and these are constantly recurring. For us is God supreme? The test has been imposed on us to-day. It will be imposed to-morrow, and every day in the week, and when we lie awake at night. It will be imposed in our business. God will be proving us from hour to hour to test whether our chief desire is to please Him. When men say and do things that would naturally provoke us to harsh and bitter words, He will be testing us. When we have the chance of getting undue advantage for ourselves out of another man's ignorance, helplessness, poverty, He will be testing us. When impure thoughts are suggested to us by something that we see

or hear in the street or read in a book, He will be testing us. When we have done wrong, or made a mistake, and can easily hide it by a lie, He will be testing us. When we have the chance of being idle, without any one knowing it in the house where we are hired for working, He will be testing us. Always, everywhere, though at some times and in some places more than others, God is proving us—is testing whether He is really our God. And if we find that He is not—that we are continually thinking thoughts, saying words, doing deeds that would be checked and prevented if He were really our God, it is clear that we have reason to be troubled, not merely by the particular offences which may show it—they may seem to be very trifling matters, things to be passed over by the Eternal and forgotten; but we have reason to be troubled by what they show; and if they show that God is not really God to us, this is fatal. Everything is wrong—wrong now; and if not remedied before it is too late, everything will be wrong for ever.

¶ The analyst has a quart of water taken from the water-supply of a great city; he tests it, discovers clear indications of sewage poison. How minute is the quantity of poison in that quart of water! Surely no one need be alarmed about it. Not alarmed? It may mean death to thousands of men and women. As soon as it is discovered the city should be ready to spend hundreds of thousands — millions if necessary — to avert the danger.[1]

4. God's great proof of us is in a manner the precise opposite of that to which He subjected Abraham. God proved Abraham by testing whether he had sufficient faith in God to sacrifice his son at God's command. God proves us by testing whether we have sufficient faith in God to believe that He loves us well enough to sacrifice His Son for us.

How many of us admire—really admire—the beauty and grace of our Lord's character and the depth of His teaching? Ah! but admiration is neither the first feeling nor the last that we ought to feel for Christ. It is too cold, too remote. The spectators on the shore who see a fisherman leap into a rough sea to save a drowning man, imperilling his own life to rescue the life of another—they may admire; but the drowning man himself

[1] R. W. Dale.

who is saved feels something different from admiration, and far deeper: he owes his life to the man who has rescued him. And we, when once we see that the Eternal Son of God has died for us, feel something far deeper than admiration, we see how awful must have been our peril, and we confess that we owe our eternal life to Him. The Gospel of Christ proves us, tests our belief in the love of God. The Gospel of Christ proves us; it proves whether we believe that our sin is so awful a thing that even the infinite mercy of God may not be able to forgive it without sacrifice; and it proves whether we believe that, notwithstanding our sin, the mercy of God is so great that the sacrifice has been offered.

I have heard one dying,
Not in sorrow, or in sighing,
In a misery of moan on moan,
In an anguish to be laid so lone,
With the blood that stoppeth slow,
With the cold, cold dark a-blow,
With the flesh that murmureth
Currish little cries of death:
I have heard one dying so . . .
To Gethsemane I go—
Christ, of God Thy sweat did win
Pardon for this rebel sin.
Sprinkle with these precious drops
Till the accusation stops;
And Thou openest Wound on Wound
For this soul of Thy compassion swooned.[1]

II.

The Morality of the Trial.

When one proceeds to look more closely at the particular test to which it was God's pleasure to subject His servant, it offers at once difficulties of a very grave description. That a good man should be told to imbrue his hands in the blood of his own guiltless boy, and should be expected to believe that a horror like that could be God's will, or a service of worship agreeable

[1] Michael Field, *Mystic Trees* (1913), 99.

to the Supreme—this certainly appears at first sight no less incredible than it is revolting. How could it consist with the Divine character to demand such a barbarity? How was it possible for the devout mind of Abraham to consent to it? It is in vain that some have sought an escape from these questions by conjecturing that the patriarch may have misconceived the manner in which his offering of Isaac was intended to be carried out. The Divine command is couched in terms too precise for that, unless we are to permit ourselves serious liberties with the narrative. Unquestionably, the sacred narrator understood that what Abraham endeavoured to do was the very thing God's voice had bidden.

The answer commonly given runs thus: "Abraham was in danger of loving Isaac more than God. He was unconsciously idolizing the darling of his old age. To show him his sin, and to recover him from it, to make his faith perfect, and to demonstrate that it was perfect, God tempted him; God placed him in a dilemma in which he was compelled to choose between Isaac and Jehovah, to sacrifice his profoundest human affection to his love for God, to show that he valued the unseen and spiritual above all that was fairest and dearest in the world of sense and time." This, as it is one of the most reasonable interpretations of the story, so it has been very generally welcomed by candid and thoughtful students of the Word. Yet, when we consider it, can we be content with it? Does it vindicate the course Abraham took? If he was in danger of loving Isaac more than God, must he, to save himself from that sin, be guilty of a still greater sin? Could it be right that, to save himself from guilt, he should kill his innocent son, and so incur a heavier guilt? Are we to condone murder on the plea that it redeems a man from idolatry, or that it strengthens his faith in spiritual realities? When the question is put thus, we feel that if Abraham attempted to kill Isaac, lest he should love him overmuch, he simply tried to cast out devils by the prince of the devils. To avoid that conclusion many plead, "But God told Abraham to offer up his son; he did not do it of his own accord: it was a Divine, not a human, expedient!" To that plea we reply, "You are simply transferring the guilt from Abraham to God. Wrong things do not become right because God tells us to do them, or, rather, because

we think He does. Right and wrong are not mere caprices that change and vary at His will. Whoever ordered it, we know that for a father to kill his blameless son must be wrong and not right; that for a sinful man to commit murder in order to save his soul, is simply to damn his soul well-nigh beyond all hope of redemption."

1. In order to understand God's part in this incident, and to remove the suspicion that God imposed upon Abraham as a duty what was really a crime, or that He was playing with the most sacred feelings of His servant, there are one or two facts which must not be left out of consideration. In the first place, Abraham did not think it wrong to sacrifice his son. His own conscience did not clash with God's command. On the contrary, it was through his own conscience that God's will impressed itself upon him. No man of Abraham's character and intelligence could suppose that any word of God could make that right which was in itself wrong, or would allow the voice of conscience to be drowned by some mysterious voice from without. If Abraham had supposed that in all circumstances it was a crime to take his son's life, he could not have listened to any voice that bade him commit this crime. The man who in our day should put his child to death and plead that he had a Divine warrant for it would either be hanged or confined as insane. No miracle would be accepted as a guarantee for the Divine dictation of such an act. No voice from heaven would be listened to for a moment, if it contradicted the voice of the universal conscience of mankind. But in Abraham's day the universal conscience had only approbation to express for such a deed as this; not only had the father absolute power over the son, so that he might do with him what he pleased; but this particular mode of disposing of a son would be considered singular only as being beyond the reach of ordinary virtue. Abraham was familiar with the idea that the most exalted form of religious worship was the sacrifice of the firstborn. He felt, in common with godly men in every age, that to offer to God cheap sacrifices, while we retain for ourselves what is truly precious, is a kind of worship that betrays our low estimate of God rather than expresses true devotion. He may have been conscious that in losing Ishmael he had felt resent-

ment against God for depriving him of so loved a possession; he may have seen Canaanite fathers offering their children to gods he knew to be utterly unworthy of any sacrifice; and this may have rankled in his mind until he felt shut up to offer his all to God in the person of his son, his only son, Isaac. At all events, however it became his conviction that God desired him to offer his son, this was a sacrifice which was in no respect forbidden by his own conscience.

¶ No one can ever persuade himself that wrong can be right. He may wish to do wrong, and please himself by pretending he has convinced himself, but all in vain. He knows at the back of his mind—and especially when he wakes at 3 a.m.—that wrong is wrong and not right.[1]

2. When we ask *why* this command did not outrage Abraham's conscience, the answer is twofold.

(1) *There was a low estimate held then of the individual life.*—In Abraham's time, and in the early history of all nations, Individualism was unknown, and a form of Socialism prevailed. "Primitive Society," as Sir Henry Maine has said, "has for its units not individuals, but groups of men united by the reality or the fiction of blood relationship." "Ancient law," he says again, "knows next to nothing of individuals. It is concerned not with individuals, but with families, not with single human beings, but groups." Again, and largely as the result of this, we must observe that, in those early days, "the eldest male parent is absolutely supreme in his household. His dominion extends to life and death, and is as unqualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves; indeed"—according to Sir Henry Maine—"the relations of sonship and serfdom appear to differ in little beyond the higher capacity which the child in blood possesses of becoming one day the head of a family himself. The flocks and herds of the children are the flocks and herds of the parent"; and further, the parent held all this property not as we hold it, as a matter of personal right, but "in a representative rather than in a proprietary character." It was what might be called tribal Socialism. It denied the right not only to private ownership in land and other material wealth, but also to private

[1] *Joseph Bell: An Appreciation* (1913), 47.

ownership of a man's own limbs and life. Our modern idea of a man as having a separate right to his own property and to his own life did not exist. As an act of justice in those days, a man's whole family was sometimes put to death with him as the punishment of his crime. A man's children were a man's property—not less dear for that; but the relationship was something so different from the relationship that exists among us that we can hardly understand it.

¶ In modern times a man's life belongs to himself; to put him to death as a sacrifice is to give up that which is not ours to give. It was not so in primitive society; a man's life belonged to his tribe, and could be disposed of by the head of his tribe. To Abraham, Isaac is a treasure of his own which he has to give up, a treasure which is dearer to him than any other earthly thing, and which it is the greatest trial of his life to part with, but which is still his own, belonging to him, and appropriate to him to surrender. To Abraham therefore the command to sacrifice his son would have a moral character altogether different from that which a similar command would have to us. This has to be remembered throughout the story.[1]

(2) Secondly, we can imagine that, as Abraham passed from one end of the promised land to another, he *would sometimes actually witness the human sacrifices* which the heathen people who then held the country offered occasionally to their gods, and he might still more frequently hear of them. The question would occur to him whether he was capable of similar devotion to the Eternal. Was his reverence for the supreme God as deep, would it prove in time of trial as effective, as their reverence for their inferior divinities? He broods over the question. Isaac is dearer to him than all the world besides. And further, it is through Isaac that all his visions of future greatness and glory for his descendants are to be fulfilled. Nor was this all: through Isaac he and his descendants are to be channels of Divine blessing to all nations. Could he, at the command of the Eternal, sacrifice Isaac as the heathen were sacrificing their own sons? Perhaps he doubts. How could he sacrifice the son that he loves with so immense a love? How could he destroy, with his own hands, his great hope, the hope of the human race, the hope which had come to him through the wonderful goodness of God? Everything else

[1] R. W. Dale.

that he had he would sacrifice at the command of God;—but this! was it not too much? It would be, no doubt, the final, the supreme proof of his faith in God and his obedience to Him; but was it possible? Then came the Divine voice. If to sacrifice Isaac seemed to Abraham the final, the supreme proof of his fidelity to God, he must do it. Abraham's own conscience declared that this would be the highest proof of his faith and obedience. It may be—it was, in this instance—an unenlightened conscience. But what he feels would be the highest proof of his faithfulness to God, this the voice of God requires from him.

¶ The memory that, in the matter of child sacrifice, the Hebrews once stood on a level with the other Semites and Canaanites distinctly shines through the narrative. But it is equally clear that a higher faith must long have been common property in the Israelitish community, before it could reflect itself in such a story in the legends regarding Abraham. Human sacrifice, and especially child sacrifice, was widely spread among the Canaanites, Phœnicians, Carthaginians, and Egyptians, and among the Moabites and Ammonites, who were akin to Israel and by these sacrifices honoured Moloch; it was also practised among Aramean and Arabian peoples. The legal enactments against the practice show that the Israelites of even post-Mosaic times had not entirely shaken off such practices. Child sacrifice continually threatened to re-establish itself, being aided in especial by the recognized sanctity attaching to a firstborn; and it again gained wider currency from the time of Ahaz. It was, without doubt, of the highest importance in the struggle with this error which it was so difficult to eradicate, that the writers of the earliest history of Israel clearly taught in Abraham's life, and by his example, in what sense it is that God desires the sacrifice even of one's dearest child, and in what sense He does not; and also that they proved that the full truth on the matter in dispute had long ago been attained.[1]

3. But although not wrong in Abraham's judgment, this sacrifice was wrong in the eye of God; how then can we justify God's command that he should make it? We justify it precisely on that ground which lies patent on the face of the narrative—God meant Abraham to make the sacrifice in spirit, not in the outward act; He meant to write deeply on the Jewish mind the

[1] A. Dillmann, *Genesis*, ii. 139.

fundamental lesson regarding sacrifice, that it is in the spirit and will that all true sacrifice is made. God intended what actually happened—that Abraham's sacrifice should be complete and that human sacrifice should receive a fatal blow. So far from introducing into Abraham's mind erroneous ideas about sacrifice, this incident finally dispelled from his mind such ideas and permanently fixed in his mind the conviction that the sacrifice God seeks is the devotion of the living soul, not the consumption of a dead body. God met him on the platform of knowledge and of morality to which he had attained, and by requiring him to sacrifice his son taught him and all his descendants in what sense alone such sacrifice can be acceptable. God meant Abraham to sacrifice his son, but not in the coarse material sense. God meant him to yield the lad truly to Him; to arrive at the consciousness that Isaac belonged more truly to God than to him, his father. It was needful that Abraham and Isaac should be in perfect harmony with the Divine will. Only by being really and absolutely in God's hand could they, or can any one, reach the whole and full good designed for them by God.

¶ There are doubtless many difficulties which may be raised on the offering of Isaac: but there are few, if any, which will not vanish away before the simple pathos and lofty spirit of the narrative itself, provided that we take it, as in fairness it must be taken, as a whole; its close not parted from its commencement nor its commencement from its close—the subordinate parts of the transaction not raised above its essential primary intention. And there is no difficulty which will not be amply compensated by reflecting on the near approach, and yet the complete repulse of the danger which might have threatened the early Church. Nothing is so remarkable a proof of a Divine and watchful interposition as the deliverance from the infirmity, the exaggeration, the excess, whatever it is, to which the noblest minds and the noblest forms of religion are subject. We have a proverb which tells us that "man's extremity is God's opportunity." St. Jerome tells us that the corresponding proverb amongst the Jews was "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen," or "In the mountain the Lord will provide"—that is, "As He had pity on Abraham so He will have pity on us." Abraham reached the very verge of an act which, even if prompted by noble motives and by a Divine call, has by all subsequent revelation and experience been pronounced accursed. At that moment his hand is stayed; and

the patriarchal religion is rescued from this conflict with the justice of the Law or the mercy of the Gospel.[1]

¶ Conversation at the Club turned a good deal upon a recent American book on the Waterloo campaign. Lord Acton mentioned that when the French troops were being mown down by the Austrian fire at the Bridge of Lodi, a private soldier called out: "Why don't you send us across the bridge? We should be killed, but the others would pass over our bodies." After the battle, enquiries were instituted for the man who made the suggestion, which was acted on; but he had fallen, as he had foreseen. I thought of the speech of the Spanish guerrilero recorded by Castelar: "General, I want to be one of the killed."[2]

III.

The Faith of Abraham.

The sacrifice of Isaac was the supreme act of Abraham's life. The faith which had been schooled by so singular an experience and by so many minor trials was here perfected and exhibited as perfect. The strength which he had been slowly gathering during a long and trying life was here acquired and used. This is the act which shines like a star out of those dark ages, and has served, for many storm-tossed souls over whom God's billows have gone, as a mark by which they could still shape their course when all else was dark. The devotedness that made the sacrifice, the trust in God that endured when even such a sacrifice was demanded, the justification of this trust by the event, and the affectionate fatherly acknowledgment with which God gloried in the man's loyalty and strength of character—all so legibly written here—come home to every heart in the time of its need.

1. Abraham has here shown the way to the highest reach of human devotedness and to the heartiest submission to the Divine will in the most heart-rending circumstances. Men and women living our modern life are brought into situations which seem as torturing and overwhelming as those of Abraham, and all who

[1] Dean Stanley, *The Jewish Church*, i. 43.

[2] Sir M. E. Grant Duff, *Notes from a Diary, 1892–95*, i. 214.

are in such conditions find, in his loyal trust in God, sympathetic and effectual aid.

¶ The Scripture narrative gives dramatic grandeur to the weird and pathetic realism of the tragic story. The demand was stern and absolute. The response was prompt and immediate. There was no hesitation, or remonstrance, or needless delay. He started early and arranged the details, and with almost unnatural calmness hurried forward the awful consummation. A sword was piercing his paternal heart, and yet it seemed as if that heart was hard and cold. No one who saw him start on his fateful journey that morning would have guessed his melancholy errand. There was in his attitude a strange silence and reserve. He was unnaturally self-possessed, and seemingly wanting in heart and soul and human sympathy. We are reminded of the Howgate carrier, of whom John Brown tells his exquisite and thrilling story. The old man brings his wife to the hospital. The old mare, Jess, and the dog Rab are there. After an operation for cancer, Ailie sinks and dies. When all is over the carrier goes hurriedly off, and speedily returns with Jess, and wraps his dead wife in blankets and carries her out and lays her gently in his cart, and takes her home. It is all in silence and loneliness. There is no word for any, save only grateful thanks. He bears his own burden, and bravely completes his allotted task. But it is more than heart and flesh can bear. The snow has not had time to melt on Ailie's grave till he is laid beside her. He went through it like a man, and bore up like a Christian, but it crushed and killed him under the strain of a great lonesome sorrow. And if Abraham survived the unmeasured bitterness of that experience in the life of sacrifice, it could only have been because God stayed his hand at the last moment, and acknowledged and rewarded the faith that dared to respond to the Divine appeal—"accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."[1]

2. Of the things contained in this record, this is the sum. The more completely and really we give ourselves to God, and for Him, and for His work in this needy and suffering world, the more do we share the "pleasures" and powers of faith, and partake of the fulness of His strength, and grace for grace. God gives His best and most to the spirit of self-sacrifice. It is the test to which He submitted Himself, and the way He took to secure His perfect and undimmed blessedness. "God so loved

[1] J. Morgan, *The Sacrament of Pain*, 165.

the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus gave Himself to a real and painful death in a spirit of obedience and self-denial, "wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." If our Master went that way to joy and glory, surely we, His disciples, must listen for the words: "Offer it for an offering"; offer work, play, home, business, pleasure, trouble, patience, faith or hope,—offer him or her, son, daughter, husband, wife, friend, as an offering.

¶ We make no real sacrifices to God. We enjoy His gifts, stock our homes with treasures, feast our hearts on His bounties, but we withhold our full, well-trained, and fire-filled personality from His altar. God asks for your child to be a missionary. He is ordained from birth to go forth, not to make a fortune, or build an everlasting name, but to be the real friend of the lost, the brotherly-helper of the needy; and you say, "No! it is too much! What have I been building this business for? I should have left it years ago, only I wanted it for him! The thought that he would carry it on has been my delight. I cannot." And so you thrust your mammon-sharpened knife through the youth's spiritual nature, and slay him in the name of wealth. Oh! if only we would take each new joy, every fresh delight, as a demand for more actual, real giving-up to God, our progress in holiness would be secured, our pleasures "would flow as a river, and our joys as the waves of the sea." [1]

IV.

Jehovah-jireh.

1. As Abraham and Isaac were travelling up the hill, the son bearing the wood and the father with the sad burden of the fire and the knife, the boy said: "Where is the lamb?" and Abraham, thrusting down his emotion and steadying his voice, said: "God will provide himself the lamb, my son." When the wonderful issue of the trial was plain before him, and as he looked back upon it, the one thought that rose in his mind was of how, beyond his meaning, his words had been true. So he named that place by a name that spoke nothing of his trial, but everything

[1] J. Clifford, *Daily Strength for Daily Living*, 35.

of God's provision—"The Lord will see," or "The Lord will provide."

¶ The Targum of Onkelos, explaining the land of Moriah as "the land of worship," *i.e.* no doubt as the land in which men appear before God in worship, paraphrases this 14th verse as follows: "And Abraham sacrificed and prayed in that place; and he said before Jehovah, In this place shall generations worship, because it shall be said in that day, In this mountain did Abraham worship before Jehovah." In the Jerusalem Targum the reference to the Temple is more clear: "Because in generations to come it shall be said, In the mount of the house of the sanctuary of Jehovah did Abraham offer up Isaac his son, and in this mountain which is the house of the sanctuary was the glory of Jehovah made manifest."[1]

2. *Jehovah-jireh*, "the Lord will provide"—it is the keynote of Abraham's life. It is just what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews declares to be the motive-power of all reverent, trustful life. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." The whole truth lies there, and it may be expressed in a sentence thus: The crown of our life is the achievement of God's purpose in us. We may take this to pieces for closer study in detail thus: God has a purpose affecting every life. He makes that purpose known to us. He grants all that we need to secure its realization.

(1) *God has a purpose in every life.*—We accept this word for reasons which are overwhelmingly sufficient. We believe in Jesus Christ. We hold as our own the precious revelation which He gives. Through Him we have come to believe in God. In Him we see the Father. This is God's great purpose—to make the very best of us, or rather to enable us to make the best of ourselves. We believe this, as we believe in God. This holds the exposition of many an event which otherwise would baffle us with its mystery. He has made us and sent us into this world, not that we may gain ease and affluence, not that we may be successful according to faulty ideas, not even that we may be happy in the common sense of the word; but that we may become good in noble, fearless, unselfish, reverent ways, strong in Christ Jesus, like-minded with God.

[1] J. J. S. Perowne, *Sermons*, 337.

¶ This life is a stage through which man is passing towards God's ideal of him, and it will not be possible to argue from his condition to the character of his Creator, until that ideal is realized. To say that God cannot be righteous because the earthly life which He has given to man falls short of what men would desire is as illogical as to judge the capabilities of an artist upon the evidence of the rough outline of some half-finished sketch. Thus Browning has to reconcile his intuitive knowledge of God with the existence, not of man as he is, but of man as he will eventually become. Accepting the witness of his inner experience as conclusive, he has to construct in idea such a heaven as an all-strong, all-wise, all-loving Cause could make. This can only be a state of absolute perfection, when "all we have willed or hoped or dreamt of good, shall exist, not its semblance, but itself." When God's end for humanity is achieved, there will no longer be any disparity between man's ideal of himself and his actual state. The ragged edges of this life will be rounded off, evil will no longer be necessary for the evolution of good, but a "further good conceivable beyond the utmost earth can realize" will be made manifest in all things;

"What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On earth the broken arcs; in heaven the perfect round."

"In that high sphere to which yearnings tend" every wrong shall be righted, and every difficulty explained. The prophetic anticipation of its coming . . . is the consolation of all who have grieved for change, or faltered before the hard truth, that "e'en though better follow, good must pass," as "silently the first gift dies away." For impossible though it be to conceive perfection adequately, and weak as is the symbolism, alike of the aged Apostle with his golden streets and gates of pearl, and of our own more cultured time, we may at least be certain that God's end for us cannot be worse than the best that we can imagine for ourselves.[1]

There is no chance, no destiny, no fate,
Can circumvent or hinder or control
The firm resolve of a determined soul.
Gifts count for nothing; will alone is great;
All things give way before it, soon or late.
What obstacle can stay the mighty force
Of the sea-seeking river in its course,
Or cause the ascending orb of day to wait?

[1] A. C. Pigou, *Robert Browning as a Religious Teacher*, 62.

Each well-born soul must win what it deserves.
Let the fool prate of luck. The fortunate
  Is he whose earnest purpose never swerves,
  Whose slightest action or inaction serves
The one great aim. Why, even Death stands still,
And waits an hour sometimes for such a will.[1]

(2) *God makes known His purpose.*—He has His angels still, though they do not bear the same bright tokens as shone around His messengers of old. "Day unto day uttereth speech." Every event, every opportunity, every call for endeavour, every claim for sacrifice has a voice; every chance of doing good, every chink through which you may flash into some dark life a cheery light, every wayside by which you may find some one to bless. The Spirit of Jesus Christ moves to kindred doings the heart in which He dwells. He gave Himself "to bring us to God." "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Open your eyes to see, and your ears to hear, and you will soon know what He would have you to do.

¶ Oftentimes, while passing through the perils and defeats of my first years in the mission field on Tanna, I wondered why God permitted such things. But on looking back now, I already clearly perceive that the Lord was thereby preparing me for doing, and providing me materials wherewith to accomplish, the best work of all my life—the kindling of the heart of Australian Presbyterianism with a living affection for these Islanders of their own Southern Seas—the binding of all their children into a happy league of shareholders, first in one mission ship, and finally in a larger and more commodious steam-auxiliary, and, last of all, in being the instrument under God of sending out missionary after missionary to the New Hebrides, to claim another island and still another for Jesus. That work, and all that may spring from it in time and Eternity, never could have been accomplished by me, but for first the sufferings and then the story of my Tanna enterprise.[2]

(3) *God grants all the enablement we need.*—If I am living along the line of God's purpose the Lord will provide. "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." That is His own good word. Let us understand, however, that it is no

[1] Ella Wheeler Wilcox, *Poems of Life*, 57.
[2] *John G. Paton: An Autobiography*, i. 359.

shelter for the idle; but a stimulus for the true and brave. He who sees and knows is the Lord of hosts, infinite in resources, adequate to every need.

¶ I believe what made me so wretched was the sudden vivid thought of how very little pleasure I could ever give Ruskin, even by the most conscientious work; that one stanza of Tennyson's was better to him, would teach more that he wanted to teach, than all my life's work. I had thought that, by earnestness and humility, and sacrifice of other works and thoughts I might really help him considerably. I have no doubt that an immense deal of thought of self is mixed with this notion; but it has its root deeper than that; and now I come to think over all Ruskin said, I see no reason to alter my conviction that I can do this work. The fact is, if one sits down to make a plan, it is often foolish and impracticable; but the plans life reveals to us, which are unfolded to us, and which we are hardly conscious of, —these, I think, are usually God's plans, and He helps us to carry them out.[1]

¶ Going to my Bible, to see what light I could find there, I opened at Isa. xli. 14, as follows: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." And opening at the forty-third chapter I read as follows: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." As I thus read, my heart was strengthened. My doubts fled away. Relying on God, what occasion had I to fear? I resolved to go, although I might appear a fool in the eyes of others; regardless of the censures of those who know not what it is to be a servant of God, and to receive and obey His orders.[2]

Where is thy God, my soul?
Is He within thy heart;
Or ruler of a distant realm
In which thou hast no part?

Where is thy God, my soul?
Only in stars and sun;
Or have the holy words of truth
His light in every one?

[1] Octavia Hill, in *Life* by C. E. Maurice (1913), 159.
[2] Madame Guyon, in *Life* by T. C. Upham, 145.

Where is thy God, my soul?
Confined to Scripture's page;
Or does His spirit check and guide
The spirit of each age?

O Ruler of the sky,
Rule Thou within my heart;
O great Adorner of the world,
Thy light of life impart.

Giver of holy words,
Bestow Thy holy power;
And aid me, whether work or thought
Engage the varying hour.

In Thee have I my help,
As all my fathers had;
I'll trust Thee when I'm sorrowful,
And serve Thee when I'm glad.[1]

3. We do not know much about Abraham's home-coming, but we are very sure that the sacrifice of thanksgiving was abundant in his life thereafter, and that his old faith became magnified into an everlasting delight in God, and that wilful sin was impossible to him from that time forward. So does grace work. That revelation of the Father was essentially the same as comes to men to-day when they find themselves in the circle of the defeated and the fearful and the self-wearied and the child-hearted. The hem of His garment may serve at other times, but in those great moments they need the truth which lies in the bosom of the mystery of Jesus—this Divine act of sin-bearing which takes away all guilt and bestows all the privileges if men will but have them. Then the penitent can say with John Bunyan, "I saw that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame of heart that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And the same message which brings him peace brings him power, for he can also say with Luther, "When I have this within, I descend from heaven, as the rain which fructifies the earth; that

[1] T. T. Lynch, *The Rivulet*, 60.

is, I go forth into another kingdom and do good works whenever an occasion offers. Whosoever really knows Christ to be his righteousness, from the heart and with joy doeth well in his vocation, for he knows that this is the will of God and that this obedience is pleasing to Him."

¶ There is all the difference in the world between the beauty of that obedience which, like a little child running to do something for its mother, seems to find a positive pleasure in the sense of obeying, and of that obedience which comes unwillingly and slowly to the point, and seems as if it meant to do no more than it absolutely must. I am not saying that the quick obedience always is better than the slow. I do not say that quickness is everything. The reluctant service which shows a resolute will, not to be turned aside from a right purpose by any degree of its own reluctance, is perhaps in many cases the better service. The man who, in spite of great inward difficulty, yet compels himself to do right, may very possibly be rendering a surer and nobler service than the man of a more facile nature, who lightly does each duty as it comes, and seems to have very little effort in doing so. But though the reluctant service may, for all that men can see, be the more real service, it is not the more beautiful. It is not the service which makes other men's service easier. It is not the service which sheds a kind of charm round true obedience, and unconsciously teaches "the beauty of holiness." Slowness, reluctance, hesitation, these must certainly spoil the service, and hurt its usefulness very much indeed. If you are real, if you make God's law your guide, if you wish to do right, and not only wish but try to do it, then add to this a resolute endeavour to be ready, to obey your conscience quickly, to leave no unfulfilled duty hanging over you like a burden, to postpone nothing to another time that you ought to do at this time.[1]

[1] Archbishop Temple.

ABRAHAM.

X.

MACHPELAH.

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Machpelah.

These all died in faith.—Heb. xi. 13.

It was now many years since Abraham and Sarah had left their common Chaldæan home. Splendid hopes had shone upon the path which led the young patriarch and his fair wife towards the promised land. His quick and reverent eye had seen through the manifold idolatries of the then peoples to the eternal God, who made all things and loved all beings; and now, less sad but more noble than the first pair, the man led forth the woman that together they might found a people for God. Great was the purpose, but the performance seemed poor. Of the promised land no field, no rood, became his; the son through whom the people was to come was long delayed. The man remained a childless nomad, without home, without family, possessed of hopes that seemed born but to die. And in those years of weary waiting both natures seemed to suffer, though, as was but fit, the deepest suffering, least lightened by hope, came to the smaller spirit of the woman. But the man's broader nature, with its larger and more illumined horizon, touched, penetrated, assimilated the woman's, made it in the image, gave it the outlook of his own. And thus these two, mated in their brilliant youth, grew through a wandering and disappointed yet disciplinary life into a ripe and beautiful and hopeful old age, made by the son they loved younger and more bountiful than their earlier age had been.

¶ It is very easy, in one sense, to grow old. You have but to sit still and do nothing, and Time passing over you will make you old. But to grow old wisely and genially is one of the most difficult tasks to which a human being can ever set himself.[1]

[1] A. K. H. Boyd, *The Recreations of a Country Parson*, ii. 208.

I.

The Death of Sarah.

And Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (the same is Hebron), in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.—Gen. xxiii. 2.

1. Into this home, so much happier in its fruitful age than in its hopeful youth, death entered, and "Sarah died in Kiriath-arba." The loss was more than the manhood of the old man could calmly bear, and he "came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." The oak round which the ivy has grown for years may well feel naked and cold when the clasping fibres are torn from its limbs and bark, and untwisted from its far-spreading roots. The old house will seem bare and forlorn when the honeysuckle which has clustered and blossomed on its walls for generations is rooted up and cast away. So this old man in whose heart, while yet young, love of the beautiful Sarah had struck deep root, into whose large nature that love had grown till its soft presence filled and made fragrant every chamber, clasped and beautified every branch, might well feel, when she fell by his side, as if his own being had been cloven in twain, the fairer section perishing while only the sterner and barer remained. What death spared, or rather produced, was so strong and painful a contrast to the living and once beautiful form he had known and loved, that, fleeing as it were from its presence and touch, he stood before the sons of Heth and cried, "Give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

2. There is something within us which rebels against the ordinary ongoing of the world side by side with our great woe; we feel as if either the whole world must mourn with us, or we must go aside from the world and have our grief out in private. The bustle of life seems so meaningless and incongruous to one whom grief has emptied of all relish for it. We seem to wrong the dead by every return of interest we show in the things of life which no longer interest *him*. Yet he speaks truly who says:—

When sorrow all our heart would ask,
We need not shun our daily task,
And hide ourselves for calm;
The herbs we seek to heal our woe,
Familiar by our pathway grow,
Our common air is balm.

We must resume our duties, not as if nothing had happened, but proudly forgetting death and putting grief aside as if this life did not need the chastening influence of such realities as we have been engaged with, or as if its business could not be pursued in an affectionate and softened spirit, but acknowledging death as real and as humbling and sobering.

3. So "Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spake unto the children of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you" (xxiii. 3, 4). See how sorrow reveals the heart. When all is going well, we wrap up our secrets; but when sorrow rends the veil, the *arcana* of the inner temple are laid bare. To look at Abraham as the great and wealthy patriarch, the emir, the chieftain of a mighty clan, we cannot guess his secret thoughts. He had been in the land for sixty-two years; and surely by this time he must have lost his first feelings of loneliness. He is probably as settled and naturalized as any of the princes round. So you might think, until he is widowed of his beloved Sarah! Then, amid his grief, you hear the real man speaking his most sacred thought: "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you."

These are very remarkable words; and they were never forgotten by his children. Speaking of the land of promise, God said, through Moses, to the people, "The land shall not be sold for ever; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." When David and his people made splendid preparations to build the Temple, as their spokesman he said, "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee; and of thine own have we given thee; for we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers. Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." And, further, in one of his matchless Psalms, he pleads, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not

thy peace at my tears; for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." So deeply had those words of Abraham sunk into the national mind that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes use of them in the great roll-call of Jewish faith: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. xi. 13).

¶ They declare plainly that they are seeking their Fatherland. They declare it more plainly for every day of the search, for every night of the accomplished homeward march. It may be said of Christ's lovers, as is said in the song in Hamlet:

> How should I your true love know
> From another one?
> By his cockle hat and staff,
> And his sandal shoon.

"Be shod," said He, "with sandals!" Do you suppose He was only talking to the Seventy, or to the Twelve? . . . Not saying over all of us, "Are they not all pilgrim souls?" That little verse which I quote, describing the marks of the lover that is on pilgrimage, describes those marks progressively: they are not all gained at once. These sandal shoes were, indeed, put on at the very beginning; but this shell in the hat, that was picked up on the shore of a certain Red Sea which lay by the pilgrim's path: and this staff that he carries was cut on the banks of the Jordan when he descended to it. He steadied himself with it as he passed through. And so, brave soul that hast consented to be a Pilgrim of the Kingdom, know this, that thy definition becomes clearer as the years go by, and thou art more perfectly known as belonging to that heaven-born, heaven-bound company, of whom the most earnest speak like one who once willed to make an earthly pilgrimage, and, being asked what he wanted, said, "I am nought, I desire nought, except to be at Jerusalem."[1]

¶ What Francis desired was what Jesus of Nazareth desired—that men should own as little as possible, that they should work with their hands for their food, and ask others for help when work failed them, that they should not give themselves unnecessary troubles and lay up superfluous possessions, that they should keep themselves free as birds and not let themselves be caught in the snares of the world, that they should go through life with

[1] J. Rendel Harris, *The Guiding Hand of God.*

thanks to God for His gifts and with songs of praise for the beauty of His works. "Like strangers and like pilgrims"—these words of an Apostle return over and over again to the mouth of Francis, when he wants to express his ideal. "He wished," says one of his biographers, "that all things should sing pilgrimage and exile."[1]

4. The first landed property, then, of the patriarchs is a grave. In this tomb were laid Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah; here, too, Jacob buried Leah, and here Jacob himself desired to be laid after his death, his last words being, "Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite." This grave, therefore, becomes the centre of the land. Where the dust of our fathers is, there is our country; and as we may often hear aged persons who are content to die, and have little else to pray for, still express a wish that they may rest in the old well-remembered churchyard where their kindred lie, and may thus in the weakness of death find some comfort, and in its solitariness some companionship from the presence of those who tenderly sheltered the helplessness of their childhood; so does this place of the dead become henceforth the centre of attraction for all Abraham's seed, to which still from Egypt their longings and hopes turn, as to the one magnetic point which, having once been fixed there, binds them ever to the land. This laying of Sarah in the tomb is the real occupation of the land.

¶ My dear young wife and I were landed on Tanna on the 5th November 1858, in excellent health and full of all tender and holy hopes. On the 12th February 1859, she was confined of a son; for two days or so both mother and child seemed to prosper, and our island-exile thrilled with joy! But the greatest of sorrows was treading hard upon the heels of that joy! My darling's strength showed no signs of rallying. In a moment, altogether unexpectedly, she died on the 3rd March. To crown my sorrows, and complete my loneliness, the dear baby boy was taken from me after one week's sickness, on the 20th March. Let those who have passed through any similar darkness as of midnight feel for me; as for all others, it would be more than vain to try to paint my sorrows. Stunned by that dreadful loss, in entering upon this field of labour to which the Lord had Himself so evidently led me, my reason seemed for a time almost to give way. Ague and fever, too, laid a depressing and weakening hand upon me, continuously recurring, and reaching oftentimes the very

[1] J. Jörgensen, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, 79.

height of its worst burning stages. But I was never altogether forsaken. The ever-merciful Lord sustained me, to lay the precious dust of my beloved ones in the same quiet grave, dug for them close by at the end of the house; in all of which last offices my own hands, despite breaking heart, had to take the principal share! I built the grave round and round with coral blocks and covered the top with beautiful white coral, broken small as gravel; and that spot became my sacred and much-frequented shrine, during all the following months and years when I laboured on for the salvation of these savage Islanders amidst difficulties, dangers, and deaths. Whensoever Tanna turns to the Lord, and is won for Christ, men in after days will find the memory of that spot still green,—where with ceaseless prayers and tears I claimed that land for God in which I had "buried my dead" with faith and hope. But for Jesus, and the fellowship He vouchsafed me there, I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave.[1]

II.

The Death of Abraham.

And Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.—Gen. xxv. 8.

At length the time drew on when this great and fruitful life should itself close. It pleased God to spare His aged servant long enough to see the stock of Isaac, after twenty years of waiting and of barrenness, blossom in a double birth. In the twins born to Rebekah was renewed the joyful "laughter" which had hailed the child of Sarah. And the brief, strange oracle which was granted to the impatience of that mother, when she sought to penetrate the future of her unborn offspring, could not be concealed from the aged head of the sacred line. It may even have been through himself, as God's prophet and mouthpiece, that the enigmatical words were spoken on which the destiny of Esau and Jacob was to turn:—

Two nations are in thy womb,
And two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels;
And the one people shall be stronger than the other people;
And the elder shall serve the younger.

[1] *John G. Paton: An Autobiography*, i. 129.

To him, at all events, these few words must have been significant and precious, since, so far as we know, they contain the latest revelation which he received from heaven. They came, a late and solitary message, obscure enough, yet welcome in spite of obscurity, to gild the long, slow, closing years of God's friend, with a reminder that God was still the watchful and gracious Guardian of His covenant. They opened before his dimming eyes one last glimpse into coming generations, and must have satisfied him that God would prove true to His promise, by continuing to be the God of his seed after he himself had been gathered to his fathers.

¶ A Scotch missionary went to West Africa in 1882, and lived for some years in perfect loneliness in the midst of savage tribes. But they learned to respect him, and to marvel at his courage and unselfishness. His triumph was all based on a growing faith. He wrote home and confessed the secret. "I am just beginning to realize that God's promises are not mere words written for the instruction of our minds, but certainties to go by, and the assurance of one of them is better than the presence of an army."[1]

1. In what various conditions and positions have we seen the patriarch! With tears of farewell in his eyes, and pilgrim staff in hand, he departs from the lovely valley of the Euphrates for a new and, humanly speaking, a dark world. Here the nomad prince is transformed into a priest, who offers sacrifice and prayers at sacred altars and on holy earth, and unfurls his banner in the name of the Lord. Not the same and yet the same, does he, after a short interval, appear, as a heroic warrior wielding his flashing sword against the enemies of Canaan. Then again, under how different an aspect is he seen, as the hospitable host waiting on his heavenly guests under the palms of Mamre. A few hours later, and the man so lately beaming with happiness is lying in the dust like a worm. There, on the hill commanding the vale of Siddim, he strives with God in prayer in the light of the setting sun, entreating God's mercy for the ungodly. A year later we see the man of one hundred years bearing about his newborn son, a new song upon his lips. Then again, he is seen as a gardener planting tamarisks for the future generations whom, by

[1] J. A. Clapperton, *The Culture of the Christian Heart*, 49.

faith, he greets in his little son. And now, behold the man upon the heights of Moriah, his countenance full of anguish and horror, his hand trembling and yet raised, and beneath him the victim whom he is to slay—his own son. And again, what a different picture when, weeping, lamenting, but not despairing, he buries in a Cave of Machpelah his dearly-loved Sarah, who had shared his joy and sorrow from youth. Once more, what a subject for a painter, when the venerable man blesses the marriage of his son with the youthful, beautiful, and amiable Rebekah, or, as a grandfather, rocks his grandchildren on his knees.

And now contemplate the venerable old man lying there upon the bier. Peace rests upon his massive brow, a happy smile still plays upon the lips of the slumberer. Is it not as though a reflection from those golden gates through which his glorified spirit has just soared were beaming on his face? Truly he is dead and yet he lives. Have not we also, in many a pleasant hour, felt a reviving breath of his spirit? How should he be dead from whom life still streams forth? Death was but the entrance into his soul's true home, into the City whose builder and maker is God. For that City he was looking all his life, and therefore God was not ashamed to be called "his God." How should he be dead of whom such a thing is told? No, not dead, but released.

Tho' changed the scene, the strife endures for ever:
  Still stand for him the imperishable laws;
For death is life, and life is growth, and never
  Is ever any pause!

He has but shattered thro' another fetter,
  Gained one more step in the eternal quest
Along the high-road leading on thro' better,
  And onward still to best.[1]

2. Grandly sets the sun of such a life. An old age spent in domestic privacy with the young hopes of his line about his feet; old age dwelling still with growing thankfulness upon the splendid revelations which had glorified its manhood and telling with unabated ardour the ever-memorable tale, yet forecasting by the

[1] G. Thomas, *The Wayside Altar* (1913), 28.

new life that was springing up what fresh tokens of God's grace and truth the coming years may bring—surely this was a fitting and a beautiful close to the toils and trials of the noblest lifetime men had yet seen. With his character grown ripe, and his work done, with his name filling the lands, his family spreading on every side, and the sacred line of the covenant budding into another generation, nothing seemed awanting to fill up his cup, who to the end of time was destined to wear the name that is of all earth's names the purest: The Friend of God. Well may the page which records his end say, with touching and simple words, that he died in his hoary age, full and satisfied with life.

¶ When a noble life has prepared old age, it is not the decline that it recalls, but the first days of immortality.[1]

¶ "Few things are more exhilarating," he wrote at this time, "I might almost say inspiriting, than the sight of a man full of years, yet not suffering otiose habits to grow on him, never affecting the affairs of youth, yet never exaggerating the infirmities of age; ever in affectionate sympathy with the young; entering with intelligent and sincere interest into the politics and literature, and social and religious movements of the day; not talking much of death, but quietly recognizing that it may be imminent, living in the fear and presence of the Risen Saviour, knowing that to depart and be with Him is best of all."[2]

¶ Solomon imperilled his reputation for wisdom when he said of the days of age that we should find no pleasure in them. It was the judgment of a pessimist and a voluptuary. By reason of failing strength and subdued passion, the pleasures of the senses may fail; but there are still pleasures of the mind and the heart. The nobler joys of life do not fade, but rather grow and strengthen with increasing years; and the surest means are to be found in the cultivation and improvement of the mind in youth. If we give full play to our higher powers, to the affections and the intellect, we shall never lack pure and elevating joys. Cicero would not have written his treatise on old age unless Roman society had appreciated the value of that time of life. He says: "The old man does not do the same things as the young man, but he performs much higher and better duties," though he admits old age "will never be anything but burdensome to a fool." One of our latest philosophers, Mr. Lecky, wrote: "Old age, when it is free from grave infirmities and from great trials and privations,

[1] Madame de Staël.

[2] C. H. Simpkinson, *The Life and Work of Bishop Thorold*, 336.

is the most honoured, the most tranquil, and perhaps, on the whole, the happiest period of life."[1]

3. Abraham died "in a good old age." The words mean more than merely advanced in years. To the Hebrew mind old age was the reward of righteousness. And the Hebrew mind was not wrong in connecting a good old age with uprightness of life. What are the things that tend to bring a good old age?

(1) The first creative force of a good old age is *faith*. Abraham, who is said to have "died in a good old age," was the "father of the faithful." Paul, our other illustration, was, and yet is, faith's most distinguished champion. The force, in both men, which kept the heart-beats strong, full, and regular, in spite of advancing years, was faith. Faith kept the stream of life full of "the murmurs and scents of the Infinite Sea." Faith kept in their souls the persuasion that clouds which hid the sky and sun were affairs of the earth, and that beyond them were a clear sky and a cloudless sun. This temper of mind, this spirit of trustfulness, first manifested itself as faith in God. Abraham and Paul "believed God."

(2) This faith in God manifests itself as *faith in humanity*. There can be no real belief in the future of man, here or elsewhere, which does not spring out of faith in God. And without faith in humanity, old age is a helpless convict, walled about with ruins the most dismal, with an experience the most awful, that the mind can imagine. On the other hand, a real faith in man, flowing from a faith in the Father of humanity, bubbles up like a spring in the desert of age to cool the parched sands and supply the thirsty soul. That there is a Divine meaning in life, in the life of the lowest man; that every force of the universe is set to make this concealed gem of good flash out its light; that every power of love in heaven and earth will ply its energies to the evolution of the angel from the brute; that it is not an even chance between good and evil with respect to his soul; that the whole set of things is for goodness; that God has manifested His interest in this matter at an awful sacrifice;—be sure of this: the man who really has those ideas at the core of his life will feel the renewals of hope day by day; youth of soul will be his for

[1] W. H. Smith, *The Life Worth Living*, 233.

ever, and old age will be an autumn time in which he may gather the fruit of his faith.

(3) "A good old age" is thus an old age which, by the influence of great ideas, has attached the gains of experience each to the other, so that at last they have *made life of a unit.* Experiences enough we all have had to make us rich in wisdom. But they have yielded no permanent gain to us, because we had no place for the gains. They have been like beautiful gems; we have had no strings on which to gather and string them, and one by one they have been lost. Noble thoughts are the strings on which we keep the events of life together. Ideas are pegs upon which we hang our experiences. Great ideas will take and hold a whole life's experiences. The man who is surest to find in old age the most of wisdom is he who has now ideas great enough to run all through his life—ideas under which he may classify his experiences. One of the great thoughts which have made many an old age a throne of glory is this: "God is the author and impulse of a great movement in the universe in which I live. That movement is the one fact which binds age to age and is the soul of history. I shall league my life with that movement which runs so swiftly towards eternal good." To a young man who seriously puts that conception of life in his heart, there is no dolorous, broken age. He is moving with the youth and hope of God. He has none of the wretched self-consciousness of a man who has kept his life for himself, and feels himself thrown aside in the universe. Nay! He sings:

Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs;
And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns.

¶ After Dr. McLaren had passed his seventieth birthday the Psalmist's words, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten," were often quoted by him, and especially when he was asked to do some one definite service from which he shrank. He had visions of how delightful it would be really and truly to "retire," to be done with never-ending "engagements." But when faced with the idea of coming to a decision, he recalled words of John Woolman: "There was a care on my mind so to pass my time, that nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the true Shepherd." He could not say that he heard that voice telling him to give up his work, and yet the thought of

a quiet life allured him. As far back as the year 1889, when his old friend Dr. Russell gave up work, he wrote to Mrs. Russell: "I enter into all that you say about the contracting of interests, and feel that it has a pathetic side. But don't you think that there is another way of looking at it, and probably a better one, namely to think of it as the expanding of leisure and calm, not unwelcome, not unfitting the evening? When a thing has two handles (as most things have) it is best to grip it by the smoother of the two. Do you know a little piece of Whittier's "My Psalm," which gives very beautifully the peaceful withdrawal from work which is coming to be our lot?—

I plough no more a desert land,
The harvest weed and tare;
The manna dropping from God's hand
Rebukes my painful care.

I break my pilgrim staff,—I lay
Aside the toiling oar;
The angel sought so far away
I welcome at my door.

"Then he says that it is enough:—

That care and trial seem at last,
Through Memory's sunset air,
Like mountain-ranges overpast
In purple distance fair;—

That all the jarring notes of life
Seem blending in a psalm,
And all the angles of its strife
Slow rounding into calm.

"We may call it *our* psalm as well as his. What a deep dent Quakerism makes on even those who have drawn a good deal off from it!"[1]

So take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same![2]

[1] *Dr. McLaren of Manchester*, 170. [2] Browning, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

ABRAHAM.

XI.

His Place in the History of Religion.

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Abraham's Place in the History of Religion.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.—John viii. 56.

With Abraham there opens a new chapter in the history of the race, a chapter of the profoundest significance. The consequences of Abraham's movements and beliefs have been limitless and enduring. All succeeding time has been influenced by him. And yet there is in his life a remarkable simplicity, and an entire absence of such events as impress contemporaries. Among all the forgotten millions of his own time he stands alone, a recognizable and memorable figure. But around his figure there gathers no throng of armed followers; with his name no vast territorial dominion, no new legislation, not even any work of literature or art is associated. The significance of his life was not military, nor legislative, nor literary, but religious.

i. The Unity of God.

To Abraham must be carried back the belief in one God. Says Wellhausen, "The religious position of Moses stands before us unsupported and incomprehensible unless we believe the tradition (Exod. iii. 13) that he appealed to the God of their fathers. Moses would hardly have made his way amongst the people, if he had come in the name of a strange and hitherto unknown God. But he might reasonably hope for success, if a fresh revelation had been made to him by the God of Abraham, who was still worshipped in some circles and still lived in the memory of the people." We may also ask, Why, unless there had been positive historical recollections forbidding it to do so, did not Israelite tradition concentrate all the glory of founding the national Church and State upon Moses? If, in spite of the great

deliverance undoubtedly achieved by Moses, Israelitish tradition nevertheless goes back beyond Moses, and finds in the patriarchs the first roots not only of the possession of the land, but also of the people's higher worship of God, this can be reasonably accounted for only by the assumption that memory had retained a hold of the actual course of events.[1]

¶ We left our steamer at Suez, remaining there that night; one hour of it, never forgotten, was spent on the roof of our hotel at sunset. The Sinaitic Range was to our left, the calm waters of the gulf before us repeating all the splendour of the heavens. We looked down at the dark silhouette of a little boat moored in the bay, in which a man standing upright looked to us like a sculptured figure in bronze. Suddenly from a minaret near went up the cry to heaven, "God is Great, God is Great, God is Great, God is Great, I witness that there is no God but God." The figure in the boat made a gesture with the hands as of prayer, and then went prostrate before the glory.[2]

ii. The Justice of God.

Upon this principle, then, that a Divine mission requires the proper man, we discern in Abraham the type which in modern language we call that of the man of thought, upon whom some deep truth has fastened with irresistible power, and whose mind dwells and feeds upon the conviction of it. The truth in the case of Abraham was the conception of one God. And we may observe that this great thought was accompanied in his mind, as it has been in all minds which have been profoundly convinced of it, by another which naturally attaches to it. We may recognize in Abraham's colloquy with God over the impending fate of Sodom something like the appearance of that great question which has always been connected with the doctrine of the unity of God—the question of the Divine justice. The doctrine of the unity of God raises the question of His justice for this reason, that—one God, who is both good and omnipotent, being assumed—we immediately think, Why should He who is omnipotent permit that which He who is in His own nature supremely good cannot desire—that is, evil? The thought, it is true, does not come out in any regular or full form in this mysterious colloquy; and yet it

[1] S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, xlvii.
[2] M. S. Watts, *George Frederick Watts*, ii. 64.

hovers over it; there are hints and forecastings of this great question, which is destined to trouble the human intellect, and to try faith, and to absorb meditation, as long as the world lasts. A shadow passes over, the air stirs slightly, and there is just that fragment of thought and questioning which would be in place as the first dawn of a great controversy. "That be far from thee, that the righteous should be as the wicked; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

¶ God's justice on offenders goes not always in the same path, nor the same pace; and he is not pardoned for the fault, who is for a while reprieved from the punishment; yea, sometimes the guest in the inn goes quietly to bed, before the reckoning for his supper is brought to him to discharge.[1]

¶ I believe that the justice of God is the righteousness of God, and that His righteousness requires righteousness in man, and can be satisfied with nothing else, and that punishment is God's protest that He is not satisfied. But it is evident that if this be so the judicial office is incomplete in itself, and must be subordinate to the teaching office, so that the condemnation of wrong may minister to the inculcation and acquisition of right.[2]

iii. A Peculiar People.

With Abraham there is also introduced the first step in a new method adopted by God in the training of men. The dispersion of men and the divergence of their languages are now seen to have been the necessary preliminary to this new step in the education of the world—the fencing round of one people till they should learn to know God and understand and exemplify His government. It is true that God reveals Himself to all men and governs all; but by selecting one race with special adaptations, and by giving to it a special training, God might more securely and more rapidly reveal Himself to all. Each nation has certain characteristics, a national character which grows by seclusion from the influences which are forming other races. There is a certain mental and moral individuality stamped upon every separate people. Nothing is more certainly retained; nothing more certainly handed down from generation to generation. It would therefore be a good practical means of conserving and deepening

[1] Thomas Fuller, *Holy and Profane State*, v. 19.
[2] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, ii. 208.

the knowledge of God, if it were made the national interest of a people to preserve it, and if it were closely identified with the national characteristics. This was the method adopted by God. He meant to combine allegiance to Himself with national advantages, and spiritual with national character, and separation in belief with a distinctly outlined and defensible territory.

¶ In seeking the ultimate answer to our question, How were the Israelites prepared to be the chosen people? we are confronted by a miracle that baffles our power to analyse: it is the supreme fact that the Spirit of the Almighty touched the spirit of certain men in ancient Israel so that they became seers and prophets. This is their own testimony, and their deeds and words amply confirm it. The experiences of men to-day also demonstrate its possibility. Indeed it is not surprising, but most natural, that the one supreme Personality in the universe should reveal Himself to and through human minds, and that the most enlightened men of the most spiritually enlightened race should be the recipients of the fullest and most perfect revelation. It is the truth that they thus perceived, and then proclaimed by word and deed and pen, that completed the preparation of the chosen people, for it was none other than the possession of a unique spiritual message that constituted the essence of their choice. Furthermore, as the greatest of the later prophets declares (Isa. xl.–lv.), that Divine choice did not mean that they were to be the recipients of exceptional favours, but rather that they were called to service. By the patient enduring of suffering and by voluntary self-sacrifice they were to perfect the revelation of God's character and will in the life of humanity.[1]

¶ The Hebrews were to have impressed upon them the ineffaceable stamp of separateness. "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." Abraham is "the ideal representative of the life of faith and of separation from the idolatries of an evil world." God's call to him detached him from his heathen environment. Separation from the world is the crux, the cross of true religion. "It is only with renunciation that life, properly speaking, can be said to begin." But what is essential in this is the detachment of the heart. "Abraham's renunciation," as Augustine observes, "was not the bodily removal, but the inward separation of the soul, from his worldly possessions." His change of locality would have effected little, had there not been at the same time a change in the condition of his heart. When God commanded His people to separate themselves, this was but a

[1] C. F. Kent, *Origin and Permanent Value of the Old Testament*, 59.

means to an end. Detachment from the creature is useless unless it leads to attachment to the Creator. God asks not only world-surrender, but self-surrender. The abiding ideal is not abstraction from the world, but protection from its evil; to be in the world without being of it; not to retire from the world, but, as Cowley says, "rather to retire from the world as it is man's, into the world as it is God's."[1]

iv. A Great Future.

It is from this point of view that the import of the Divine covenant affirmed to have been made with the patriarch, and the assurances which it conveyed of a great future in store for their posterity, must be considered. The ultimate greatness of Israel existed potentially from the first; and those who held the course of the world to be ordered by a Divine will naturally and rightly believed that the destiny of their race was providentially directed. In this, indeed, they were not singular. The idea that the fortunes of a nation were the special care of the nation's god was shared by Israel with Moab, Assyria, and other peoples; and is familiar enough in classical literature. But the destiny of Israel did not culminate with national aggrandizement, though it is possible that in the promises recorded to have been made by God to the patriarchs this is principally in the mind of the historian. The development of a doctrine of God which the civilized world has made its own, and the gradual shaping of hopes which found their fulfilment in our Lord, give to the early beliefs of Israel a distinction the equal of which cannot be claimed for those of any other ancient people.

¶ While other nations had the misleading idea that this or that, other than righteousness, is saving, and it is not; that this or that, other than conduct, brings happiness, and it does not; Israel had the true idea that righteousness is saving, that to conduct belongs happiness. Nor let it be said that other nations, too, had at least something of this idea. They had, but they were not possessed with it; and to feel it enough to make the world feel it, it was necessary to be possessed with it. It is not sufficient to have been visited by such an idea at times, to have had it forced occasionally on one's mind by the teachings of experience. No; he that hath the bride is the bridegroom; the idea belongs to him who has most loved it. Common prudence can say: Honesty

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 19.

is the best policy; morality can say: To conduct belongs happiness. But Israel and the Bible are filled with religious joy, and rise higher and say: "Righteousness is salvation!"—and this is what is inspiring. "I have stuck unto thy testimonies! Eternal, what love have I unto thy law! all the day long is my study in it. Thy testimonies have I claimed as mine heritage for ever, and why? they are the very joy of my heart!" This is why the testimonies of righteousness are Israel's heritage for ever, because they were the very joy of his heart. Herein Israel stood alone, the friend and elect of the Eternal. "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation, neither have the heathen knowledge of his laws."[1]

¶ In studying the religious development of the Hebrews, two important points must be emphasized from the first. Israel was surrounded by the traditions of five great empires—Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, the Hittites, and the Cretans. Directly or indirectly, the Hebrews drew the whole of their secular arts, even the simplest, from one or other of these, and in all material matters, peaceable or warlike, these empires were incomparably their superiors. And yet the polytheism of these imposing neighbours exercised no influence to speak of upon the beliefs and ritual of the small and divided nation set in their midst. And the second point is like unto the first. Besides the great nations, Israel was surrounded by numbers of smaller tribes—Moab, Edom, Amalek, and the rest—their near kin in blood and language, and, in point of culture, very much on the same level with themselves. And yet Israel, that unoriginal, semi-civilized people, who could not cut a tunnel straight through the rock of their metropolis, in the one realm of religion shot ahead of all their contemporaries and passed in the rapid course of a few centuries from polytheism (or perhaps more correctly polydaemonism) through henotheism to the uncompromising monotheism of the later prophets and psalmists. When we take into account first the environment, which was not only hostile to such a development, but even left no room or precedent for such a conception, and, secondly, the exaggerated conservatism of religion in the Semite; when also we take into account the natural unfitness for new ideas which Israel displayed in material affairs; we can but wonder in silence. Nothing like it has ever happened in the world. The miracles recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures may possibly in time be all accounted for, with the advance of natural or critical science: but each step taken in that direction only brings into greater prominence this central

[1] Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma.*

miracle of the Old Testament, which no account of soi-disant Rationalism can explain away.[1]

v. The Father of the Faithful.

What is the peculiar character of the covenant made with Abraham, which caused him to differ from other religious men of his time? Abraham was a man of faith, and the purpose of the patriarchal covenant was the education of faith in the heart of a family chosen by God to display to the world the marks and powers of faith. Looked at from this standpoint, the history of Abraham and his successors marks itself off and rises above all the rest and becomes an object-lesson. In it are to be found all the facts required to set out the nature of religious faith, its difficulties and its triumph.

The elements of faith are—

(1) *Knowledge*: every religious faith presupposes a Divine message, a meeting with God.

(2) *Assent*: a spontaneous movement of the soul, a moral affinity and deep sympathy of the heart, which over-rules the material perceptions and wins the message acceptance, at times even in the teeth of probability or preference or the cold calculations of reason.

(3) *Trust*: a triumphant effort of the will, which leaves our fate to the wisdom of Him who gave the message and allowed the heart to perceive Him. Faith, for its realization, requires absolute trust, begetting obedience and raising it high above all human selfishness. That is what St. Paul calls "the obedience of faith" or the faith of the heart, the fount of justice.

In the religious education of the patriarchs we find very clearly marked the three constituent elements of faith. There is a clear message and a formal meeting with God. What did *Elohistic* worshippers expect from their patron gods? Prosperity in their lands, victory in their battles, and a numerous seed multiplying the resources and strength of the tribe. God promises Abraham a fertile land, a royal power which no enemy can destroy, and a numberless posterity, sprung from a son whom Sarah shall give him in his old age. To these promises, purely temporal and in line with Abraham's religious development, the patriarch

[1] R. A. S. Macalister, *A History of Civilization in Palestine*, 83.

replies by an assent which binds him to the new God whose benefits he accepts. This assent, which never failed for a moment in the chequered career of the patriarch, constitutes the moral unity of his conscience and contributes more than anything else to the impression of majesty left on our minds by Abraham's religious character. The reason is that the grand promises of God are not unconditional, and the covenant agreed to by the son of Terah is a contract to which there are two parties. To each benefit of God there must be a corresponding act of faith on the part of Abraham. To form and train this faith, God makes use of a feeling which seems to have been especially marked in the patriarch's soul, namely, family affection. The history of Abraham shows us that he clung above all to his kindred, and that ties of blood were all powerful with him. It is by means of these that God speaks to him and brings him, through a series of conflicts between the interests of the flesh and the Divine will, to transform the assent of faith into the proportions of an heroic trust and obedience.

¶ The requirement of faith runs through the entire Old Testament. "In the Old as in the New Testament, faith is the subjective condition of salvation." It is the prerequisite of all spiritual blessings—pardon, guidance, enrichment, help, discipline, communion. The words regarding Abraham (he "believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness") contain the essence of evangelical faith. When the typical believer was counted righteous by the Divine Judge, the meaning is not that he was acquitted—for acquittal declares that a man has done no wrong—but that God accepted him in spite of his sins. The evangel of both Testaments is that righteousness is not achieved by deeds, but received as a gracious gift. Had Abraham won God's favour by his extraordinary merits, he would have been no example for his posterity: but he was accepted by God for his faith, which all could imitate. Here, as Ewald says, is "a sketch and model of genuine faith which could never be forgotten, but in all succeeding ages exerted a wonderful influence. The writer regards faith in its extreme importance as the chief and crowning excellence of a man's life in God."[1]

¶ The Bible does not define "faith"—even Hebrews xi. 1 is scarcely an exception—but exhibits it in action. It does not command faith in express terms, but recommends it by example.

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 78.

The men and women, or if you please so to regard them, the characters, whether historical or symbolical, of the Old Testament, live as though they saw the Invisible. That they do not in other things always rise above the level of their times, that they are occasionally disfigured by insincerity or cruelty or sensuality, does not lessen the wonder of their faith but rather serves as a foil to set it off. Being what they were, living when they did, they were on the whole victorious over the evil of the world; their faith in God saved them from the worst things. That is the lesson of every good life depicted in the Hebrew Bible, and it is a lesson of surpassing value for all ages.[1]

vi. Abraham and God.

Thus Abraham is the prototype of all that is highest in the old Semitic religion—of all that was best fitted to serve as a foundation for a great moral and religious development. Abraham is in fact a representative of Semitism in two points especially: in his strong consciousness of God, and in the impulse which moved him to separate himself from an alien and more highly developed civilization. He is the pastoral chief whose life of wandering in the desert has imbued him with a sense of the irresistible power that lies behind the rugged and stern phenomena of nature amid which his lot is cast. In a spirit of awe, of receptivity, of submission to the leadings of his God, he passes from land to land, dwelling in tents, rearing his altar for sacrifice beneath the open sky, shunning the tumult of cities, and sojourning in the broad and silent spaces of the wilderness. This tendency to withdraw from the centres of civilization and to prefer a life of primitive simplicity is illustrated by the narrative of the "call of Abraham." Such deliberate abandonment of the idolatrous and highly developed culture of Babylon is typical of the moral intensity of the pastoral Semites. It marked them out as the people of revelation. It separated them from the corruptions of polytheism. It was what the New Testament represents it to be—an act of faith in which was involved the possibility of a special and unique relationship to God. The name of Abraham thus stands for a symbol of the fact that in the soil of a purely natural religion the Divine Spirit was at work from the beginning, awakening a higher consciousness of God, and laying the founda-

[1] H. B. Swete, in *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, 546.

tion of a movement which was destined to find its climax in the perfect union of man with God in Jesus Christ.

¶ All spiritual blessings have at once a marvellous increase of power over the soul, when we become distinctly conscious of them. God in His overflowing mercy gives Himself to many even when they do not know that He is moving their hearts. For we are plainly told that "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him," and there is no word to limit this to those who are conscious of the source of their love. But how much fuller is his blessing, how much greater his strength, how much surer his confidence, who not only is upheld by God's almighty hand, but knows the hand which upholds him, and knows that it can never fail! Hence at all times do we need to be reminded to seek that union which alone is the permanent source of life. Granted that God gives it to us sometimes when we do not seek it; so indeed He gives many of His best blessings. Yet He reserves a special blessing for those who seek it. It is not enough to be conscientious. Let us press on to be religious: that is, to pray heartily for strength, to confess our sins to our heavenly Father, to make it the purpose of our lives to please Him, to recall to our memories the Cross which seems to set forth all love that ever was in one single act, and so at last to teach ourselves to be His children. If we can really learn that lesson, we have little else to learn.[1]

¶ The result of all religion is to bring us into union with God. We are made one with Him in understanding when, by renouncing our own wisdom, we seek continually and believingly for wisdom from on high; one in affection, when we desire and love what He desires and loves; one in will, when our purposes are as His are. There can be no true moral union between God and man until the human will is brought into harmony with the Divine. And this life of union, which is the highest and most glorious result of our being, is the gift of God. A fundamental condition of it is, that we shall resign ourselves to Him, that we may be His in all things, and that we may receive this and all other blessings at His hand. God alone can accomplish it. Still, the creature must consent to have it done. God loves His creatures; God is the source of light to them; God in Christ is the true Saviour. But man must, at least, recognize his alienation, and in becoming willing and desirous to be saved, must expand his soul to the Divine operation. The creature, therefore, must open the window; it is the least he can do; but it is the sun himself, the Eternal Sun, that must give the light.

[1] Archbishop Temple.

Strive after union with God; but do not too readily or easily believe that you have attained to it. The traveller, after many fatigues and dangers, arrives at the top of a mountain. As he looks abroad from that high eminence, and in that clear atmosphere, he sees his native city: and it seems to him to be very near. Overjoyed at the sight, and perhaps deceived by his position, he proclaims himself as already at the end of his journey. But he soon finds that the distance was greater than he supposed. He is obliged to descend into valleys, and to climb over hills, and to surmount rugged rocks, and to wind his tired steps over many a mile of weary way, before he reaches that home and city, which he once thought so near.[1]

[1] Madame Guyon, in *Life* by T. C. Upham, 243, 416.

ABRAHAM.

XII.

His Personal Character.

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Abraham's Personal Character.

Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God.—James ii. 23.

No human name can vie with Abraham's for the widespread reverence which it has evoked among all races and throughout all time. The pious Jew looked forward to reposing after death in the bosom of Father Abraham. The fact of descent from him was counted by thousands sufficient to secure them a passport into heaven. Apostles so opposite as Paul and James united in commending his example to the imitation of primitive Christians, in an age which had seen the Lord Jesus Himself. The mediæval Church canonized Abraham alone among Old Testament worthies, by no decree, but by popular consent. Devout Muhammadans reverence his name as second only to that of their prophet. What was the secret of this widespread renown? It is not because he headed one of the greatest movements of the human family; nor yet because he evinced manly and intellectual vigour; nor because he possessed vast wealth. It is the remarkable nobility of his religious life that has made him the object of veneration to all generations of mankind.

I.

His Faith.

At the basis of his character was a mighty faith—"Abraham believed God." In that faith he left his native land, and travelled to one which was promised, but not clearly indicated. In that faith he felt able to let Lot choose the best he could for himself; because he was sure that none could do better for himself than God was prepared to do for the one who trusted Him. In that

faith he waited through long years, sure that God would give him the promised child. In that faith he lived a nomad life, dwelling in tents, and making no attempt to return to the settled country from which he had come out. Indeed, his soul was consumed with the passionate expectancy of the city of God. In that faith he was prepared to offer Isaac. In that faith he buried Sarah. In that faith he died.

1. Abraham's faith was *faith in the unseen.* He had faith in an unseen future because he had faith in an unseen God. One property of faith is that it gives to things which are future and as yet only hoped for all the reality of actual present existence. Future things may be said to have no existence for those who do not believe in them. They are not taken into account. Men do not shape their conduct with any reference to them. But when a man believes in certain events that are to be, this faith of his lends to these future things the reality, the "substance," which things actually existing in the present have. They have the same weight with him, the same influence upon his conduct.

¶ Men may despise faith in the unseen as an idle dream. They may tell us to husband our material resources, to advance our scientific knowledge, to elaborate our political and social arrangements, and to banish all such unrealities from our thoughts. But assuredly the belief in a Divine prompting has ever been the most potent, most beneficent, most enduring influence in the history of mankind. Look outside the pale of sacred history. Take as examples the two greatest of the Greeks—the greatest in the world of thought, and the greatest in the world of action. What was it that singled out Socrates among all the philosophers and moralists of Greece, and invested his character with a moral sublimity unapproached by the rest? What else but his belief that he too was prompted by a Divine spirit, a supernatural voice, deterring, advising, inspiring, stimulating, to which he rendered implicit obedience, and for which he was content cheerfully to face even death itself? What was it that rescued Alexander from the herd of vulgar conquerors and tyrants, despite all his faults, that gave its permanence to his work and influence, and made it a true *præparatio evangelica*? What, I ask again, but his belief that he was sent from heaven to break down the partition wall between Greek and Barbarian, and to fuse them into one common polity, under one common rule?[1]

[1] Bishop Lightfoot.

2. But again, Abraham's faith was *faith in God's promises.*

(1) Take one of these promises. Abraham had returned from his victory over the kings, and the loneliness of his household, with none but his slaves to inherit his property, may well have made him feel bitterly that God had given him everything except the blessing he most longed for. And then it was that the word of Jehovah came to him in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Hereupon Abraham is encouraged to speak out what is in his mind, and he says, "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless; and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir?" Then God promised him an heir born of his own stock, and showed him that magnificent sight, the depth of the Eastern sky, with stars whose number and brightness we in the dull West can hardly conceive; and said unto him, "So shall thy seed be." The host of heaven, which so many Eastern tribes have been led to worship for their glory and brightness as the divinest thing they knew, was to Abraham only the sacramental pledge, the outward and visible sign, of the covenant of Jehovah with his servant. "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

(2) Take another promise. He was called to sacrifice his son, and he determined to do so; but this son was given by promise, and was given expressly as the root of a great nation; this promise Abraham continued to believe, even at the time when he was preparing to obey the command; he did not doubt that this very Isaac, who was going "like a lamb to the slaughter," even if slaughtered, would still be the means of fulfilling the Divine assurances. He knew God to be faithful; he knew He could not lie; he believed, therefore, that He would furnish some means, whatever they might be, of harmonizing the contradictory duties to which he was called. The patriarch might possibly hope that God would interfere to prevent the completion of the fatal act, or to interrupt the progress of the preparatory proceedings. Perhaps, however, his mind dwelt most strongly upon the idea of Isaac being actually offered and actually restored to life. This seems obviously the meaning of the Apostle. "He that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." The struggle in

the mind of the patriarch would be between his general knowledge of this power on the part of God, and his expectation of its exercise in this particular case. It is intimated that, whatever might be at first the suggestions of affection or weakness, this expectation rose superior to them all. He continued to feel firmly persuaded that the promises he had received would be fulfilled; that they would be fulfilled in and by Isaac; and that He who had directed the mysterious act which he was about to accomplish would make its performance consistent with a confidence in His previous prediction. This is emphatically "against hope, believing in hope"; trusting to eternal truth, in spite of apparent physical impossibilities.

It is from this point of view that one comes to see the force and reasonableness of that profound and memorable word: Abraham "believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." The simple, childlike trust which, even in uncircumcision, Abraham was enabled to repose in the promises of God's favour did what only a perfect "righteousness" of his own could have done under the original compact with unfallen Adam. That is to say, it brought him back, sinner as he was, into a position of friendship and favour with God; and it gave him a claim upon such Divine help and benediction as it must be the supreme reward of all "righteousness" to attain. Personal righteousness, in the sense of such a faultless obedience to Divine law as might have deserved the friendship or the blessing of the righteous Judge, Abraham of course had none, any more than any of us. But what he could not win from justice by his righteousness, that the grace of Jehovah granted to his trustfulness. For so soon as the man trusted Jehovah's word of friendly promise he became a party to a covenant of reconciliation, and obtained a title to its blessings. By making him a party to such a contract of friendship, his faith made Abraham a "friend" of God, and God the God of Abraham. He became a reconciled ally of his once offended Lord. Thus the beneficent and merciful One above, and the sinful but repentant one beneath, came together in an unequal yet most fruitful compact.

¶ He was most diligent in providing the Divine Life in his soul with its necessary condition of activity and growth by maintaining a fellowship with God as close and as constant, I

believe, as was ever maintained by man. His spirit was continually steeped in the heavenly dews of prayer. For prayer he was always ready. My father prayed continually because God was to him so great and vivid a reality—the Reality of realities. But prayer—such is always its beneficent reflex action—helped to make God to him a greater and more vivid reality still. The more he prayed, the more real to his perception did God become. To him, God was not a hundredth part as much a luminous postulate of the reason as a vital experience of the heart—his atmosphere, his sunlight, his very breath, his very life. I venture to think it difficult, if not impossible, that God should ever be more real to man or woman than He was to him. Doubtless there were fluctuations in the degree in which he realized the Divine presence. Like the sea, the soul has its tides—the ebbs and flows of spiritual feeling. Yet the impression left on the minds of those nearest to him was that his God-consciousness was always at the full.[1]

3. Abraham's faith was the more conspicuous that he had to wait so long before the promises were fulfilled. It is instructive, for example, to observe how long that matter of obtaining an heir for Abraham occupies the stage of sacred history and in how many aspects it is shown. The stage is rapidly cleared of whatever else might naturally have invited attention, and interest is concentrated on the heir that is to be. The risks run by the appointed mother, the doubts of the father, the surrender now of the mother's rights—all this is trivial if it concerned only one household, important only when it is viewed as significant for the race. It was thus that men were taught to brood thoughtfully upon the future and to believe that, though Divine blessing and salvation would spring from earth, man was to co-operate with God, to recognize himself as capable of uniting with God in the highest of all purposes. At the same time, this long and continually deferred expectation of Abraham was the simple means adopted by God to convince men once for all that the promised seed is not of nature but of grace, that it is God who sends all effectual and determining blessing, and that we must learn to adapt ourselves to His ways and wait upon Him.

¶ The recently published *Letters of Marcus Dods* are suggestive of many things; but there is one thing worth special mention.

[1] H. Varley, *Henry Varley's Life-Story* (1913), 240.

It was his bitter experience to endure more than five years' waiting between his being licensed by the Presbytery and getting a church. In one of these letters he likens himself to the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda who, when the Angel gave healing virtue to the water, was unable because of his handicap to avail himself of his opportunity. But, says Dods significantly, "One thing I did not do, I did not throw mud at the Angel." In other words, he did not gird at circumstances, nor fling gibes at the omissions of Providence. With every fibre of his brain and will did he dig into the ores of knowledge, saying to himself: "A church I may never get, but if I do, I will be ready for the church." And when waiting had done its work, Providence opened up to him the mighty purpose for which he had been girded. The God who kept Marcus Dods waiting those trying years was the God who made him "chief among the brethren."[1]

¶ It is often a greater trial to a man's spirit to wait than to work. How often are we placed in circumstances which no action of our own is likely to improve—in which it is clearly prudent to take no step, to do nothing, to say nothing; but to wait and see what the opposite party will do or say. Restless from temperament or some other cause, people go and do something when it would be infinitely better that they had sat quietly at home and done nothing. How frequently are clever people the victims of this over-activity! All cultivated persons are aware of the importance of work, but few have considered how much wisdom there often is in waiting. Among salutary maxims here is one men need most to lay to heart, but to remain passive does not belong to every one's character. Of all the lessons that humanity has to learn in life's school, the hardest is to learn to wait.[2]

4. Not only had he to wait, but when the fulfilment came it was far other than Abraham expected. For God's promises never are fulfilled in the sense in which they seem to have been given. Life is a deception; its anticipations, which are God's promises to the imagination, are never realized; they who know life best, and have trusted God most to fill it with blessings, are ever the first to say that life is a series of disappointments. And in the spirit of this text we have to say that it is a wise and merciful arrangement which ordains it thus.

(1) What does Abraham find? He finds that, though face to

[1] A. Shepherd, *Bible Studies in Living Subjects*, 60.
[2] H. W. Smith, *The Life Worth Living*, 318.

face with the inheritance, the promise by no means puts him in possession of it, that he has to begin and gain it, quite as if no promise of it had been made to him; that he has to buy it, to fight for it, to take pledges of it by leaving his dead in it. He finds that he must use his own efforts, and his own sense of what is right and necessary, and his own judgment; and he has to restrain himself, and wait and hope for a success which he has not yet attained. And, further, he finds that he cannot settle down in one place, and work from there in order to acquire the whole, as if he had made a sure conquest, at least, of one spot of it. He cannot call any part of it certainly his own; he has to wander from place to place, sometimes harassed by the burning heat, although generally under the grateful shadow of the oaks of Mamre. He sometimes even loses all hold of it whatsoever, and, finding no sustenance in it, is driven out of it by sheer hunger, and forced to look even in Egypt for the means of keeping himself alive; discovering that though the promise was, "a land flowing with milk and honey," there might be such a mighty famine that life could not be maintained against it.

Is not that a picture of the life of many believing men? They enter upon the promised heritage, but find themselves unable to conquer it. What characterizes their experience is restlessness, instability, no settled abode, no sure footing—flitting from one spot of the promised heritage to another, finding the heritage exceeding broad, yet finding themselves without power to enter into the possession of it—finding, to their disappointment, that where they hoped the promise of God would do all for them, it seems to do nothing; and so they must put forth every effort of their own, must buy, and fight, and endure, and see their best endeavours but feebly rewarded, and the day of their hopes ever deferred. They wonder that God does so little for them, does in fact nothing for them distinctly and apart from their own endeavour, except it be that somehow He sustains in them the hope that He will yet do much for them. And under this hope they are able to put forth strong efforts of their own; and when these are not crowned with success, they are able to wait.

(2) But there is no sign of despondency in the case of Abraham. The disappointment and delay cleared his view of

what the heritage was. Probably he set out with no very clearly defined idea of what he was to receive. He had not got possession even of that which he was led to expect. But he had attained to the feeling that possession of it would not satisfy him. The little possession of it that he had raised a larger object of desire before his mind. But the first defeat of his hopes cleared his mind of clouds; and there stood out before him the object of his desire, no longer dim, but well defined. "He looked for the city which hath foundations, whose planner and builder is God." That which he longed for bodied itself out to him as a city—a city with foundations—a city planned and built by God. It was no more a place merely, nor a land merely—it was a city of God, a stable, eternal dwelling-place, no mere tent, pitched and struck many times a day. It had foundations; it was the rest of the people of God.

Let us keep before us this city that hath foundations, whose builder is God—that well-ordered, active, just, human, godly life; let us strive to reach such a city, such a social, friendly, human life, and life with God. We may not succeed; but we shall find pursuing this object greater blessedness than attaining any other. We shall no more be mindful of the country whence we came out. There will be ever growing up in our hearts the ideal of the city where God is, where men are, wherein dwelleth righteousness. And if, like Abraham, we have to die in faith, without receiving the promises, it will be but a step till faith gives place to sight, and all God's promises become Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus.

¶ As regards death, which so haunted his soul, Tolstoy showed real insight when he declared that men often fear it chiefly because they have never yet found true and adequate life. John Stuart Mill wisely remarked, it is hard to die without having ever truly lived. As Robertson of Brighton said, none of the promises of God are fulfilled in this life. The utterly wasted faculties of some of the very noblest characters seem to demand a future life with quite special eloquence and imperiousness. Over the graves of many grand and heroic failures, over the graves of many glorious spiritual abortions, discerning human pity cries aloud to the far-off Creator with perplexed sorrow and immeasurable suggestiveness. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

God's apparent failures are often far more prophetically suggestive than His successes. The noblest of the sons of God are often the most "sore let and hindered" during their earthly careers. They are specially out of harmony with their mundane environment. Unsuited for earthly success, they declare plainly that they seek a better country, that is, a heavenly.[1]

II.

His Titles.

There are two names by which Abraham is known in the traditions of the East. Though they occur only once or twice in Scripture, yet so well do they correspond to its whole representation of Abraham that they may fitly be taken as his distinguishing characteristics.

1. First, he is "the friend of God." "Khalil-'Allah," or, as he is more usually called, "El-Kalil," simply, "The Friend," is a title which has in Muslim countries superseded altogether his own proper name. In many ways it has a peculiar significance. It is, in its most general aspect, an illustration of the difference which has been well remarked between the early beginnings of Jewish history and those of any other ancient nation. Grant to the uttermost the uncertain, shadowy, fragmentary character of these primitive records, yet there is one point brought out clearly and distinctly. The ancestor of the chosen people is not, as in the legends of Greece and Rome, or even of Germany, a god or a demi-god, or the son of a god: he is, as we have just observed, a mere man, a chief, such as those to whom these records were first presented must have constantly seen with their own eyes. The interval between the human and Divine is never confounded. Close as are the communications with Deity, yet the Divine essence is always veiled, the man is never absorbed into it. Abraham is "the friend," but he is nothing more. He is nothing more; but he is nothing less. He is "the friend of God."

The title includes a double meaning. He is "beloved of God." "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." He was "chosen" by God; he was "called" by God.

[1] A. H. Craufurd, *The Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy*, 39.

In him was exemplified the fundamental truth of all religion, that God has not deserted the world; that His work is carried on by His chosen instruments; that good men are not only His creatures and His servants, but His friends. In those simple words in which the Biblical narrative describes "the call," whatever there is of truth in the predestinarian doctrine of Augustine and of Calvin finds its earliest expression. But the further meaning involved in the title of Abraham indicates the correlative truth—not only was Abraham beloved by God, but God was "beloved by him"; not only was God the Friend of Abraham, but Abraham was "the friend of God." To expand this truth is to see what was the religion, the communion with the Supreme, which raised Abraham above his fellow-men.

¶ Of no mortal man but of Abraham alone does Almighty God ever speak and say, He was My friend. God employs many gracious, beautiful, and endearing names in speaking of the patriarchs, and prophets, and psalmists, and other saints of His in Israel; but it is of Abraham alone that God testifies to Israel and says, Thou art the seed of Abraham, My friend.[1]

2. The second name by which Abraham is known is "the father of the faithful." Two points are involved in this name also. First, he was himself "the faithful." In him was most distinctly manifested the gift of "faith." In him, long, long before Luther, long before St. Paul, was it proclaimed in a sense far more universal and clear than the "paradox" of the Reformer, not less clear and universal than the preaching of the Apostle, that "man is justified by faith." But Abraham was not only faithful himself, he was also the father of the faithful. Look at the history of the Jewish race. What was the secret of its long, unbroken life, the principle which revived, animated, sustained it amidst all disasters and under every oppression? Was it not faith—faith in a Divine purpose, in a Divine call, in a Divine mission for the race? With all their narrowness and all their meanness and all their weakness, even amidst all their defections, this faith never died out. It was the breath of their national life. The spirit of Abraham never altogether left his children. And so they were despised, and yet they triumphed: they were trampled under foot, and yet they dictated terms to

[1] A. Whyte.

the nations. "The vanquished," said Seneca bitterly of the Jews, "have given laws to the victors." He was dismayed by the spread of Jewish beliefs, of Jewish customs, everywhere. What would he not have said, if he could have looked forward for three centuries to the time when the spiritual Israel—the offspring of Abraham by faith—should plant its throne on the ruins of the majesty and power of imperial Rome?

¶ Abraham went out on an unknown way, in search of an unknown heritage. He believed that the heritage existed, he believed that God would bring him to it, and he cast himself upon Him to show him the way. But it is his ignorance that the Scripture magnifies. Faith is belief in God amidst ignorance, it is trusting God in the dark. And how great was Abraham's ignorance we may conceive, when we remember that he was the first faithful man of the time. And how great the darkness was, on a way which none had trod in his day! All he knew was God; that was the only firm point he had. And even his knowledge of God was faith. By faith he knew God; by faith he believed God; by faith he committed himself to an unknown way towards an unknown land. This was faith. Worthy was he to be called the father of the faithful.[1]

¶ "The father of the faithful"—is not that the title of one who by faith inspires another to be faithful? In the *Life of Octavia Hill* there may be found this note by Dr. Greville MacDonald: "Miss Octavia Hill had an extraordinary influence upon me in my boyhood, though she could have known nothing of it. She was the first person who taught me how to learn, and how to love learning. In my youth, when I began to know a little of her social power and her personal sacrifice, she had more to do, I think, than even my father, in giving me a steadfast faith; which, thanks to her heart and life, became established amidst the ruins of conflicting questions, and has ever grown in steadfastness."[2]

III.

The Fruit of his Faith.

The fruit of his faith is found in Abraham's character. Now character, to be truly great, needs to be uniform and consistent; it

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Called of God*, 73.
[2] *Life of Octavia Hill*, by C. E. Maurice (1913), 191.

is that which is habitual; that which is seen to prompt and preside in ordinary duty as well as in remarkable emergencies. And character, to be complete, requires the beautiful and the soft as well as the imposing; it should have grace in combination with strength; it should display the attractive and the lovely as well as the sublime. Let it have the devotion inspired by faith, the firmness prescribed by principle, the noble attitude of a high-toned and unimpeachable honour; let it have all this, and we will give it the tribute of our homage, and acknowledge its obvious superiority, but still we want something more—we want something to engage the heart as well as to secure the understanding; something to love as well as to respect; we want the bland and courteous demeanour; we want "grace poured into the lips"; we want to lose the awe inspired by the strength of virtue, while listening to the voice and luxuriating in the view of her tenderness. We want, in short, the union of all that is firm in principle, and all that is fervent in piety, and all that is commanding in worth, with whatever is attractive in manners or amiable in feeling; and with all that can sweeten, and soothe, and satisfy, in the contact of ordinary intercourse.

Now, we do not say that we shall find all this in the moral portrait of Abraham; but we do say that we shall find a great deal of it. That he committed errors and had his faults is only saying that he was a man; but that these bore no proportion to the diversified excellence of his character, and the eminent purity of his life, is manifest from the whole tenor of his history. He deserves distinction, not only for that faith from which such a strong and steady light is cast upon his memory, but for various delicacies of mind and feeling which surround it with a beautiful and softened effulgence. These, indeed, were the fruits of his faith. They were the displays of the principle which rendered him "the friend of God," called forth by the contact of its possessor with men. It was an active and practical power, prompting to universal obedience. It did not consist in speculative notions about the Divine attributes, or in mere mental acquiescence in the Divine procedure, or in selfish acceptance of the Divine promises, or in any other exclusively intellectual or internal act; it consisted in the carrying out of every pulsation of the heart and every conclusion of the understanding into the

vigorous and conscientious discharge of whatever it became him to regard, either as a servant of the true God or as a man related to other men, to whom he owed, therefore, the diversified expressions of social morality.

¶ It is recorded of a famous French statesman, that when any man whom he did not know was recommended to him, he would ask: "Is he anything?" His purpose, of course, was to find whether the man had individuality and character; and the form of his question implied that he regarded those who did not possess individuality as nonentities. This question is a most necessary one; and it should be applied to every man. "Is he anything?" In regard to a very large portion of men in the present age the answer would have to be, "No; he is nothing." Their lives are not based in reality.[1]

1. *He was pious towards God.*—That Abraham was a devout man; and that this was displayed, both by his regard to positive acts of worship accompanied by external expressions of devotion and by the prevailing habit of his mind, is evident from the general tenor of his life. He is expressly and beautifully denominated "the friend of God"; a title which implies congeniality and intercourse. He was a man of prayer. With what inimitable simplicity is the fact stated by the historian, when he says, and says so often, "then did Abraham call upon the name of the Lord." It was thus that he both acknowledged his obligations to the protecting Power and received supplies of invigorating strength. It was by these exercises that faith was nourished and preserved.

¶ The Hebrews had a dislike for abstract terms. Their profoundest thoughts on religion were vivid pictures. They did not speak of cultivating godliness, or of deepening spiritual life, but of walking before God. To live in the realized presence of God, to order their thoughts and acts so as to harmonize with His character, to rejoice in His company, to look up to Him with a smile of loving recognition in the work and warfare of life—this was to walk before God. It was the Psalmist's ideal to set the Lord always before him, to walk in the light of His countenance; Micah's, to walk humbly with his God. It was Milton's ideal to live ever in the Taskmaster's eye; Brother Lawrence's, to practise the presence of God. "God and the angels are spectators," said Bacon. It is the thought of God's presence which makes men

[1] R. H. Hodgson, *Glad Tidings*, 28.

serious, devout, earnest, trustful, consecrated, holy. Agnostics preach an independent morality; they would have men do their duty without a thought of God, who, they say, is in any case unknowable. But common men find, and history proves, that the morality which goes without God soon grows limp and tired, while the righteousness which stays itself on God has an unquenchable ardour and energy. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." God is the indispensable moral dynamic, and walking before God is the highest ethics. The everlasting goodness is after all godliness—a living before, with, in, for, and like God.[1]

2. *He was courteous and yet courageous with men.*—He was certainly respected, if not loved, by those who surrounded him and with whom he came in contact in the ordinary intercourse of life; and this respect on their part could have been excited only by corresponding behaviour on his. It was the respect, not of fear, but of admiration and affection; there was a good deal of tenderness about it. He and his neighbours entered into leagues of amity, and, when differences arose between them in consequence of the conduct of their servants, there was no seizing upon them to vent smothered feelings of pride or animosity, but a candid and open explanation; both sides were ready to act with a desire to excel each other in respect, and to display a confidence inspired by esteem. But this courtesy, on the part of the patriarch, never led to compliances or compacts inconsistent with his religious profession. He was all that man could be, and all that man ought to be, to his fellows. Whatever was honourable, whatever was attractive appeared in Abraham towards his idolatrous neighbours. There was cordiality and kindness; there was the friendly and familiar interchange of good offices; but there was not the sanction of what was sinful, or the formation of such intimate confederacies, as might lead either himself or his son to disobey the Supreme law. Hence, though he lived on such terms as we have described with the people of the land; though his devotion had nothing about it like morbid moroseness; though, when necessary, he could mix and mingle in the world, without betraying anything like the proud feeling of personal degradation; yet he would not on any account permit that Isaac should take from among its

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 98.

families the wife of his bosom. His servant was solemnly commanded to prevent this, and was sent to secure a more suitable alliance.

¶ Courtesy is really doing unto others as you would be done unto, and the heart of it lies in a careful consideration for the feelings of other people. It comes from putting one's self in one's neighbour's place, and trying to enter into his mind, and it demands a certain suppression of one's self, and a certain delicate sympathy with one's neighbour. So far as our abounding egotism reigns, we are bound to be discourteous, because we shall be so blindly immersed in our own affairs that we cannot even see the things of others. So far as we break the bonds of self and project ourselves into the life of our brother man, we are bound to be courteous, because we shall now be interested in what is dear to him. Surely there is no one who does not desire to live after the rule of courtesy, and there is no way of attaining this fine spirit except by keeping high company. Just as we live in the atmosphere of nobility, where people are generous, and chivalrous, and charitable, and reverent, shall we learn the habit of faultless manners, and acquire the mind which inspires every word and deed with grace. And the highest fellowship is open unto every man, and he that walks therein catches its spirit. For the very perfect knight of human history, who carried Himself without reproach from the cradle to the grave, was our Lord and Master Christ, and the rudest who follow Him will take on the character of His gentleness.[1]

¶ His great strength of will was doubtless one of the sources from which he drew the courage that was among his most pronounced characteristics. In that heroic virtue he was unsurpassed, and might unfalteringly have taken his stand beside men of the stuff of Martin Luther and John Knox. He feared nothing and nobody in his championship of right and truth as he saw them clear before him, or in his denunciation of what he deemed to be error and wrong. On occasion, his courage touched the level of the magnificent. He spoke and acted "in scorn of consequence." To be in a minority never troubled him, he knew that "one and God always constitute a majority." He was only a young man of twenty-nine when, at the annual meeting of the local branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society, he rose from his seat in the audience, and protested against the occupancy of the chair by one of the great London brewers, who was drawing his wealth from his five hundred "tied houses," scattered over the city, that were

[1] John Watson, *The Homely Virtues*, 167.

open every Sunday throughout the year. "Sir," he cried to the agitated secretary, standing aghast at the chairman's side, "how was it possible for you and your committee to invite as president over a meeting such as this one of the greatest Sabbath-breakers in the metropolis?" The courage displayed in that protest remained with him to the end of life, inflexible and unimpaired. As an old man of seventy-three he took the lead in denouncing the visit to Australia, for the purposes of his brutalizing profession, of a notorious English prize-fighter. "I do this," said he, "in the defence of righteousness, and in the interests of all that is humane, moral, and peaceable in the Commonwealth.[1]

Of Courtesy it is much less
Than Courage of Heart or Holiness,
Yet in my Walks it seems to me
That the Grace of God is in Courtesy.

On Monks I did in Storrington fall,
They took me straight into their Hall;
I saw Three Pictures on a wall,
And Courtesy was in them all.

The first the Annunciation;
The second the Visitation;
The third the Consolation,
Of God that was Our Lady's Son.

The first was of Saint Gabriel;
On Wings a-flame from Heaven he fell;
And as he went upon one knee
He shone with Heavenly Courtesy.

Our Lady out of Nazareth rode—
It was Her month of heavy load;
Yet was Her face both great and kind,
For Courtesy was in Her Mind.

The third it was our little Lord,
Whom all the Kings in arms adored;
He was so small you could not see
His large intent of Courtesy.[2]

[1] H. Varley, *Henry Varley's Life Story* (1913), 233.
[2] Hilaire Belloc, *Verses*, 20.

SARAH.

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SARAH.

And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and moreover I will give thee a son of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her.—Gen. xvii. 15, 16.

1. In approaching the study of Sarah we may assume that we stand upon firm ground, and are dealing, not with a legendary but with an historic person. And we may observe at once that the whole of the portrait—the earliest portrait of a woman in the Bible—is drawn with so firm a hand that, as Charles Reade maintained, it must be either the most masterly fiction or a copy from the life. It is well to remember that our character-sketch is understood to belong to a period some 4000 years before the birth of Christ; and while human nature has changed but little, there is considerable change in the manners and customs as between those old-world Eastern people and ourselves.

The Scripture narrative itself is almost filled with the grand figure of Abraham. Sarah is hardly visible in the shadow of her distinguished husband. But her presence is always felt. We have the impression, which is no doubt true, that she had considerable strength of character and practical ability. Abraham was something of an idealist, something of a dreamer. Sarah was much more matter of fact. Abraham's was the more patient and enduring character; Sarah's perhaps was the more assertive and shrewd. Abraham, if we may reverently so put it, had the better knowledge of God; Sarah perhaps had the better knowledge of human nature. Abraham's characteristic attitude was that of waiting upon God; Sarah was more of a schemer. From Abraham came the impulses and the high purposes of their united life; but it says much for the shrewd and practical woman that she acquiesced in these impulses and high purposes.

Yet if Abraham was the father, Sarah was the mother, of the faithful. And if in Eve we see our ancestress as men, in Sarah we see our ancestress as believers in God. It is therefore all the more encouraging to us in our frailties and failures that no more in the case of the woman than in that of her husband is any attempt made to conceal the declensions and the faults which marred a noble character. Indeed, while of Abraham most of the things that are told illustrate his virtues, of Sarah most of the episodes display her infirmities, though we are left in no doubt concerning the virtues which underlie them.

2. All that we know of Sarah's early history is what Abraham himself has left on record concerning her. In his interview with Abimelech he said that she was his half-sister, the daughter of his father, though not the daughter of his mother. With Abraham she came out from her idolatrous kindred, and with him was willing to lead the life of a stranger and a pilgrim. During the ten years' tabernacle sojourn in the land of Canaan she was the faithful companion of her husband, the sharer of his joys and sorrows, and witness of all the mercies bestowed upon him by God. Although on two occasions she is said to have become partaker of her husband's duplicity, and though she had recourse to carnal devices to accomplish the Divine purpose, yet was she on the whole one of the holy women who trusted in God, and whose "adorning" was "the hidden man of the heart," even "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." St. Peter, commending her obedience to Abraham as her lord, proposes her as an example to Christian matrons, while all believing women who do well and have no reason to fear are said to be "her daughters."

¶ In 1856 Marion M^c^Laren became my wife. God allowed us to be together till the dark December of 1884. Others could speak of her charm, her beauty, her gifts and goodness. Most of what she was to me is for ever locked in my heart. But I would fain that, in any notices of what I am, or have been able to do, it should be told that the best part of it all came and comes from her. We read and thought together, and her clear, bright intellect illumined obscurities and "rejoiced in the truth." We worked and bore together, and her courage and deftness made toil easy and charmed away difficulties. She lived a life of nobleness, of

strenuous effort, of aspiration, of sympathy, self-forgetfulness, and love. She was my guide, my inspirer, my corrector, my reward. Of all human formative influences on my character and life hers is the strongest and the best.[1]

¶ I sometimes think "the woman" is the representative in the family of the third person in the Holy Trinity, the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, who is the fountain of all the beautiful, the tender, the motherly, the womanly—the human family being considered the reflex of the Divine, who said, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness," and then we read, "male and female created he them." Nothing will destroy the worship of the Virgin Mother in the Romish Church, where in their pictures she is blasphemously placed upon the same throne with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit, whom she has replaced, only hovering as a dove over her head—nothing, I believe, will dethrone her and destroy her worship but a scriptural understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the tender, the motherly, the womanly. It was after the Athanasian Creed was made (and you cannot put love and tenderness into a hard, dogmatic creed) that the personal love and most melting tenderness of the Holy Spirit was lost sight of, and His throne and worship profanely given to Mary. But any holy woman is such as she, a representative on earth of Him; and what a pure consecration does not this thought give to you, in your office as a comforter, a pleader with souls, as thus the Holy Spirit pleads with them to draw them to Christ. It is not you that speak, but the Holy Spirit that is in you, and this is woman's special mission, in this rough and dark and weary world, by love, by gentleness, by most sisterly tenderness, by whatsoever things are lovely, and through all gates called Beautiful, to draw souls, as the Holy Spirit draws them to the Saviour, to testify, as He does of Him, to take, as He does of the things of Christ, and show them to the soul.[2]

I.

The Beautiful Woman and True.

Sarah was related to her husband before their marriage, and was ten years younger than he. The earliest mention of her is at the time when Abraham, in obedience to the Divine command,

[1] *Dr. McLaren of Manchester*, 271.

[2] *W. B. Robertson of Irvine* (by J. Brown), 425.

went forth "from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan" (Gen. xi. 29–31). He was accompanied by his father and his nephew, and by his wife. No doubt Sarah would feel very deeply this parting from friends and much that was dear to her in the old home; but although it is implied that Abraham's entrance into Canaan was delayed on his father's account (Acts vii. 4) there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that his wife was ever unwilling to go where he wished or that his progress was in any way hindered by her. The outstanding quality by which she lives in our memory is the steadfastness of her conjugal devotion. From morn to eve, in storm and in calm, in shadow and in sunshine, in the flush of youth and amid the falling leaves of autumn, she is ever by her husband Abraham's side. Prosperity does not divorce them; adversity does not divide them; time only deepens the intensity of their union.

1. When the scene first opens on the married life of Abraham and Sarah, they are having an experience which their romance had not bargained for—the poverty of the land. They have passed from Ur into Haran and from Haran into Canaan. In Canaan there has arisen a great famine. And Abraham has to think of again removing his tent, as there are others besides himself to care for—his wife, his nephew Lot and his servants—and he casts his eyes and his thoughts towards Egypt, the land of plenty, the fertile country where corn abounded even when other places were stricken with famine. And there in Egypt Abraham is guilty of denying that Sarah is his wife. His fear is that the roving eyes of men in power may fall upon Sarah's beautiful face, and that they would desire to be rid of the inconvenient husband. "Say thou art my sister," he said, and Sarah obeyed her lord.

2. A more terrible strain upon a woman's conjugal love is not to be conceived. Yet this noble woman stood the strain. She surrendered herself to the solacing of her husband's despair. To bring him peace of mind she acceded to his desire. She consented to a deception; but it was a deception that led right down into a deep vault of self-sacrifice. Sarah is one of the finest specimens of tenacious married life that it is possible to meet. Certainly Abraham ought to have been the one to shield and protect his

wife from the evil that he knew her beauty would suggest; instead of this he practically handed her over to Pharaoh and Abimelech in turn by saying, "She is my sister." But although the faith of Abraham failed, the faithfulness of God did not fail, and He promptly rescued Sarah from the perilous position, and averted disaster.

¶ "If we believe not, he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." But oh, how we dishonour our Lord whenever we fail to trust Him, and what peace, blessing, and triumph we lose in thus sinning against the Faithful One! May we never again presume in anything to doubt Him! Want of trust is at the root of almost all our sins and all our weaknesses; and how shall we escape from it, but by looking to Him, and observing His faithfulness?[1]

II.

The Despairing and Jealous Wife.

1. When God called Abraham out of the country of the Chaldees, and brought him into the borders of Canaan, He told him that He would give that land to his offspring. Brooding over things when they had finally settled in what was really their permanent home by the oaks of Mamre, near Hebron, his heroic wife wondered how the promise made to her husband was to be fulfilled. Ten years had passed and no child was born. Abraham was rich and increased with goods; things had gone well with them from a worldly point of view since their return from Egypt; Abraham was a great man, but then the promise was, "I will make of thee a great nation," and of this there was no sign; and brooding over these things Sarah came to the sorrowful conclusion that the promise was to be fulfilled not through her but through another. Abraham had much faith, and faith kept him patient, but Sarah could not wait. And so, in accordance with the custom of the times in which she lived, she gave her handmaid Hagar to be the wife of Abraham.

It was perhaps defective faith, and yet it was faith, that led the woman to this expedient. Had she herself before this time received the promise of a son, she would have been an example

[1] *Hudson Taylor's Choice Sayings*, 30.

rather of unbelief than of faith. But whilst God promises that Abraham shall be a father, He says nothing about Sarah; He is silent on the point as to whether she is to be the mother of the nation that is to spring from his loins. This uncertainty may have influenced her to give that counsel to her husband which led to so much sorrow and strife in the household, so many jealousies and heart-burnings.

2. Sarah very soon found that her slave was assuming an air of superiority, and openly despising the mistress she had hitherto respected. The indignant and jealous woman appealed to her husband reproachfully, forgetting that the husband had only acted on her suggestion. If Abraham had been more courageous, we could be more severe in our judgment of Sarah. But the husband, taunted beyond endurance, handed his poor slave-girl over to her mistress, and the mistress made her life unbearable, until the maid ran away from the face of her mistress and sought shelter in the wilderness.

Perhaps Sarah is seen at her worst in this domestic quarrel, not only in her jealousy but in the way in which it finds expression, first towards her husband and then towards Hagar. And yet we would not have it otherwise; she is a true pioneer of woman's right in the right place. She will be mistress in her own home and reign there without a rival. It is a scriptural condemnation of polygamy in any form. But we must not forget that Sarah had been instrumental in bringing the trouble into the home, and God sent Hagar back to be under Sarah's care; and it was like a princess (for that is the meaning of Sarah) to receive her back and to make the best of the situation.

¶ Magnanimity is well enough defined by its name, yet we may say it is pride's good sense and the noblest path to renown.[1]

¶ The treasures are given in charge to a virtue of which we hear too little in modern times, as distinct from others; Magnanimity: largeness of heart: not softness or weakness of heart, mind you—but capacity of heart—the great measuring virtue, which weighs in heavenly balances all that may be given, and all that may be gained; and sees how to do noblest things in noblest ways: which of two goods comprehends and therefore chooses the greater: which of two personal sacrifices dares and

[1] Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*.

accepts the larger: which, out of the avenues of beneficence, treads always that which opens farthest into the blue fields of futurity: that character, in fine, which, in those words taken by us at first for the description of a Queen among the nations, looks less to the present power than to the distant promise; "Strength and honour are in her clothing,—and she shall rejoice in time to come."[1]

III.

The Mother of Nations.

1. Ishmael was the fruit of Hagar's marriage, and for the fourteen years in which the boy was growing up to manhood he may have been regarded as the promised seed; but at length, God breaks the silence again, and declares that Sarah, not Hagar, shall be "a mother of nations," and that "kings of people shall be of her." At first it seemed as though Abraham was tempted to question this, for he ventured to suggest an alternative, when he said unto God, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" And God said, "Nay, but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son." And when Sarah heard the same promise from the lips of the angel who visited them on the plains of Mamre, "she laughed within herself" at the apparent impossibility of its fulfilment. But the Lord reproved her unbelief, and met her doubts with the convincing question, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

2. Upon her heart these words left a painful reminder of her sin in doubting God's merciful and powerful interposition in her history, as well as of the all-knowledge and almightiness of Him with whom she had to do. And Sarah believed. At length, in the faith of both his parents, there was present the prerequisite condition for Isaac's supernatural conception. Sarah believed God, and the hope that sprang from His promise was to her "a tree of life," and did not make her ashamed. She believed God, and His word was her evidence that as He had spoken so it should come to pass. Her faith had its reward. "Because she judged him faithful who had promised," she became the mother of the seed from which He was to spring "in whom all families of the earth should be blessed."

[1] Ruskin, *A Joy for Ever*, § 59 (*Works*, xvi. 56).

3. There was a different tone in Sarah's laugh when the promise had been fulfilled. Cruel though she had been—unreasonably so—towards Hagar, God kept His promise to Abraham through her, and she became the mother of the heir to all the promises. When Isaac was born, her heart was filled with laughter, and the sound of it was so pleasant to hear that all who heard it laughed with her. The child of hope had come, the child of high destiny and marvellous anticipations.

He is the child of laughter; there is merriment at hearth and board. But the laughter is not all joy; the jeer of scorn mingles with it. Hagar, the bondwoman, beheld with sorrow of heart the frustration of the hopes she had cherished respecting her son as the future heir of Abraham. This feeling strengthened into jealousy and dislike, which she seems to have imparted to Ishmael, who was about fourteen years old at the birth of Isaac. Sarah also, on her part, was, by the birth of a son of her own, freed from the considerations which had probably hitherto restrained and regulated her conduct towards them. Nor is it difficult to account for this; for from one so much the senior of Isaac as Ishmael, and of a resolute and intractable character, she might reasonably apprehend some danger to the heritage, and even to the person, of her son, in case Abraham should depart from life during his nonage. Such feelings on both sides came to an explosion on the occasion of a public festival, held three years after the birth of Isaac, to celebrate his weaning. The hostility and rancour of Hagar and her son were so undisguisedly manifested on this occasion, that Sarah cast off all restraint, and insisted with Abraham that both mother and son should be forthwith sent away. She stood up in her majesty before her husband —princess-like—and said with an emphasis that could not be mistaken, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." And every right-thinking wife and mother will take the side of Sarah. Scripture itself does; God does; for although the matter was grievous to Abraham on account of his son, God said, "In all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

¶ Love and respect Woman. Seek in her not merely a comfort, but a force, an inspiration, the redoubling of your in-

tellectual and moral faculties. Cancel from your minds every idea of superiority over woman. You have none whatsoever. Long prejudice, an inferior education, and a perennial legal inequality and injustice have created that apparent intellectual inferiority which has been converted into an argument of continued oppression. Consider Woman, therefore, as the partner and companion, not merely of your joys and sorrows, but of your thoughts, your aspirations, your studies, and your endeavours after social amelioration. Consider her your equal in your civil and political life. Be ye the two human wings that lift the soul towards the ideal we are destined to attain.[1]

IV.

The Lover to the End.

1. We now draw near to the end of Sarah's life. Our narrative does not tell us how she was affected by the episode of the offering of Isaac. But Jewish tradition, guessing in its accustomed way from the close juxtaposition of the episode and of Sarah's death, always asserted that the shock of the event was what killed her. Abraham, it declares, returning from his journey, found Sarah dead in Kiriath-arba, where Hebron afterwards stood. This is mere fiction, but there is one passing touch in the Scripture narrative which gives colour to it: "and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (xxiv. 67), suggests that the love of this mother and son was lifelong, and deepened with the years. Isaac mourned her with a bitter mourning, and well he might. Taking her all in all, we see in her, in these latter days, a loving mother and a loyal wife.

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd in music out of sight.

2. She was lovingly laid to rest in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, in the land of Canaan; and Abraham does not withhold his tribute to her sterling worth, her steadfastness, her devotion, her high conception of wifely duty. The

[1] Mazzini, *Life and Writings*, iv. 284.

shrine which marks the tomb of Sarah at Machpelah is still reverently pointed out by the Muhammadans, who possess it. It is one of the few sites in the Holy Land which may be considered quite authentic. And certainly, if authentic, it is holy ground; for here lies the mother and the wife, her husband and her son beside her, the first woman who stands out in history distinctly portrayed, beautiful in person, but more beautiful still in the strength of her motherly love, a woman far from perfect, and yet a typical woman, appealing to our sympathy in her hunger of heart, and in the joy of her satisfaction, and furnishing a sober warning to all her daughters in the violence of her jealousy and the persistence of her hatred. She is no conventional character, but through her veins courses that genial tide which commends her to the kinship and love of mankind.

A ruddy drop of human blood
The surging sea outweighs;
The world uncertain comes and goes,
The lover rooted stays.

¶ Thy note received the evening before my birthday made me very happy. Among the many kind greetings which reach me on this anniversary, thine has been most welcome, for a word of praise from thee [Oliver Wendell Holmes] is prized more highly than all, though I do not undervalue any one's love or friendship. I have often since I met thee in Boston thought of thy remark that we four singers seem to be isolated—set apart as it were—in lonely companionship, garlanded as if for sacrifice, the world about us waiting to see who first shall falter in his song, who first shall pass out of the sunshine into the great shadow! There is something pathetic in it all. I feel like clasping closer the hands of my companions. I realize more and more that fame and notoriety can avail little in our situation; that love is the one essential thing, always welcome, outliving time and change, and going with us into the unguessed possibilities of death.[1]

¶ Fichte (in his *Blessed Life*) seems to discountenance attachment to the individual and the visible. The clinging which to cut away would be cutting the heart to the quick, he would call an indication of a mind not set on the Invisible. And yet how is this? Then they who feel least, and attach themselves least, are the religious of the earth. The gentlest and tenderest, who

[1] J. G. Whittier, in *Life and Letters* by S. T. Pickard, ii. 654.

have forgotten self in the being of another, are consoled with the pleasing assurance, that they "have neither part nor lot" in the blessed life. And He, whose tears flowed so freely over the grave of friendship, and over His country's doomed metropolis, who loved John with so peculiar and selective an attachment—what are we to say of Him? Oh! it cannot be. It cannot be that God has given us beings here to love, and that to love them intensely is idolatry. I can understand self-annihilation for another dearer than self; but I cannot understand the annihilation of those dear affections, nor the sacrifice of a bleeding heart at the shrine of Him whose name is Love.[1]

"A waverer, Lord, am I," saith one—
"Here, there, I run."
"My messenger be thou, to tell
Of Heaven to hell."

"How little love, O Lord, I feel—
My heart is steel."
"But I the Magnet am," saith He,
"And steel's for Me."

"Ah, Lord, I lean with love on man
Whene'er I can."
"Who clings to man, My proxy, he
Clings so to Me."[2]

[1] *Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson*, 214.
[2] W. Meynell, *Verses and Re-verses*, 46.

MELCHIZEDEK.

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MELCHIZEDEK.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all.—Gen. xiv. 18-20.

Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.—Ps. cx. 4.

THE historical character of the narrative in which Melchizedek is mentioned has been questioned on the ground of certain improbabilities which it contains; but though the events related have received no direct corroboration from other sources, the names of two of the kings who fought against Abraham, viz. Amraphel and Arioch, have with some plausibility been identified with those of Hammurabi and Eriaku, contemporary kings of Babylon and Larsa; so that, if the identification is correct, it confirms the *setting* of the story, though not its incidents. For the name and personality of Melchizedek no independent confirmatory evidence has yet been obtained. But we shall treat the narrative historically before passing to what is the important matter, the priesthood of Melchizedek.

I.

THE HISTORICAL MELCHIZEDEK.

1. In the days of Abraham, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, with three confederate kings, took and plundered Sodom and led the inhabitants away captive, among them Lot and his family. The tidings of what had befallen his nephew came to Abraham where he dwelt in his tent under the oaks of Mamre. He at once led forth his trained servants, three hundred and eighteen, and

pursued the conquerors, and "brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. The king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him, at the vale of Shaveh (the same is the King's Vale)." The king of Sodom went forth in gratitude, doubtless, to offer thanks to his deliverer. But a more remarkable personage than the king of Sodom appeared upon the scene. "And Melchizedek," we read, "king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him"—that is, Abraham gave Melchizedek—"a tenth of all." Then straightway Melchizedek falls back into the obscurity out of which he had thus suddenly emerged, and nothing more is said of him in that history.

2. Melchizedek is generally recognized as the most mysterious and unaccountable of historical personages; appearing here in the King's Vale no one knows whence, and disappearing no one knows whither, but coming with his hands full of substantial gifts for the wearied household of Abraham and the captive women that were with him. Of each of the patriarchs we can tell the paternity, the date of his birth, and the date of his death; but this man stands with none to claim him, he forms no part of any series of links by which the oldest and the present times are connected.

Melchizedek (as we are reminded in Hebrews) means "The King of righteousness"; which, according to the Hebrew idiom, would mean emphatically "The Righteous King"—a title which he may have won for himself by the purity and justice of his life in the midst of a land where such men were few. If this is not a personal name, it is at least a description of character which enables us to understand what sort of man he was in the estimation of others. His other title was derived from his dominion—"King of Salem, which is, King of peace." Of course the kings of those early days in Canaan were rather chiefs over small places—the gathering, perhaps, of a few tents. A king

might be a man in Abraham's own position, able to muster three hundred and eighteen men of war; only this one was perhaps a man hating all the arts of conquest and seeking to maintain his position by equity and character rather than by spear and sword, and so loved to be called "The King of peace."

¶ "The King of peace"—it is a title which has not often been appropriated. We are told, says Lord Avebury, that each nation must protect its own interests; but the greatest interest of every country is—Peace. In thinking of war we are too apt to remember only the pomp and ceremony, the cheerful music, brilliant uniforms and arms glittering in the sunshine, and to forget the bayonets dripping with blood. The carnage and suffering which war entails are terrible to contemplate. Moreover, all wars are unsuccessful. The only question is which of the combatants suffers most. "Nothing," said the Duke of Wellington, "except a battle lost, can be half so melancholy as a battle won." Nothing is so ruinous to a country as a successful war, excepting, of course, one that is unsuccessful. Victor Cousin, in his introduction to the *History of Philosophy*, designates war as the terrible, indeed, but necessary instrument of civilization, which he says is founded on two rocks—"le champ de bataille ou la solitude du cabinet." Surely it would be more correct to say that the horrors of war are continually counteracting the blessings of peace and thought. Victory is only defeat in disguise. Milton says:

> Who overcomes
> By force hath overcome but half his foe.

And, to quote a great German writer, Schiller justly tells us that "the enemy who is overturned will rise again, but he who is reconciled is truly vanquished."

Are there not troubles and dangers and anxieties enough in life without creating others for ourselves? The poor we have always with us; bad seasons and poor harvests we must expect; changes of climate, failure of mines, new discoveries, fluctuations of commerce, even changes of fashion, may involve heavy losses and much suffering, but the worst misfortunes of all are those which nations bring on themselves.

We talk of foreign nations, but in fact there are no really foreign countries. The interests of nations are so interwoven, we are bound together by such strong, if sometimes almost invisible, threads, that if one suffers all suffer; if one flourishes it is good for the rest.

Lord Derby (the 15th Earl) once said that the greatest of British interests was peace. And so it is; not merely that we should be at peace ourselves, but that other countries should be at peace also. It is not, however, only our greatest interest, it is the greatest interest of every country. After all we ought not to forget that we are a Christian country. If the so-called Christian nations were nations of Christians there would be no wars. The present state of Europe is a disgrace to us not only as men of common sense, but as being altogether inconsistent with any form of religious conviction.[1]

3. Melchizedek was a king and also a priest. He was the king of the city Salem, but it is also noted specially in the narrative that he was a priest—and that not at some heathen shrine of Moloch or Malcom—but of "God Most High." We are told very distinctly that Melchizedek blessed Abraham and prayed the blessing of God Most High upon him, at the same time blessing God for the deliverance of Abraham. This solitary figure of the king thus standing between God and Abraham is very striking, and shows that true religion was still possible and actual outside the Abrahamic relation to God. And Abraham's attitude of immediate willingness to receive blessing is a striking testimony to his consciousness of the spiritual position and power of Melchizedek. By payment of the tithe, Abraham acknowledges the legitimacy of Melchizedek's priesthood and the religious bond of a common monotheism uniting them.

Though possessed of the knowledge of the Most High God, Melchizedek's name is not found in any of those genealogies which show us how that knowledge passed from father to son. This king-priest rises up out of the darkness, does one act, and straightway falls back into the darkness, a solitary form; nothing is known of him in the way of origin, and nothing in the way of departure; no birth is recorded and no death; he took his priesthood through no human intervention, and resigned it to no human successor, holding the office and not yielding it.

Here is the greatest man of the time, a man before whom Abraham, the father of the faithful, the honoured of all nations, bowed and paid tithes; and yet he appears and passes away like a vision of the night. A royal priest he is, without predecessor

[1] Lord Avebury, *Peace and Happiness*, 369.

or successor that we hear of, yet honoured to stand and minister between even Abraham and his God, commissioned to bless the man in whom rested by Divine decree the promised blessing for all mankind, and offer back to Heaven the first-fruits of the land of promise.

This strange king is lost sight of for one thousand years till David says of Christ in Psalm cx., "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." He disappears again for another thousand years, and is then fully introduced to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Jews would make him Enoch, or a survivor of the Flood, or Shem, or an angel, or the Holy Ghost, or Christ. But these are idle guesses. The Pentateuch gives us his history; in that history the Psalmist finds a mystery or a hidden spiritual meaning; in the Epistle to the Hebrews the veil is lifted and the mystery is "made manifest." The story of the Pentateuch is the nutshell in which the Psalmist tells us there is a rare kernel, the Epistle to the Hebrews opens the shell and presents us with the kernel.

Thrice bless'd are they, who feel their loneliness;
To whom nor voice of friends nor pleasant scene
Brings aught on which the sadden'd heart can lean;
Yea, the rich earth, garb'd in her daintiest dress
Of light and joy, doth but the more oppress,
Claiming responsive smiles and rapture high;
Till, sick at heart, beyond the veil they fly,
Seeking His Presence, who alone can bless.
Such, in strange days, the weapons of Heaven's grace;
When, passing o'er the high-born Hebrew line,
He moulds the vessel of His vast design;
Fatherless, homeless, reft of age and place,
Sever'd from earth, and careless of its wreck,
Born through long woe His rare Melchizedek.[1]

II.

The Order of Melchizedek.

It will hardly be questioned that, if we had had no other information than is found in Genesis, we would have

[1] J. H. Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions.*

unhesitatingly concluded that Melchizedek was simply an extremely pious, God-fearing man who lived in the midst of an ungodly race, and held forth the banner of truth in the worship of the one living and true God. But our method of viewing that narrative has been materially affected by what we find recorded in other parts of Scripture. Our eyes have been thereby opened to perceive that there is an air of mystery about it which a cursory reading of it does not at first disclose. Melchizedek appears on the scene suddenly, and then disappears as suddenly. We are told that he was a priest of the Most High God, or rather *the* priest of the Most High God. He blesses Abraham, and that patriarch pays tithes to him. He could be no ordinary man who thus assumed superiority over the friend of God, and from whom the great head of the Hebrew race accepted a blessing. This mystery continued for many generations unrelieved by any ray of light from heaven.

1. Then came the oracle in Ps. cx. But the author of that Psalm does not entirely remove the mystery left around the subject by the narrative in Genesis. He, however, gives us a little more light in a particular direction. He brings more vividly before our minds Melchizedek's priestly office. He does not tell us definitely who Melchizedek was, but he presses upon our notice the fact that his priesthood is eternal. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

(1) The Psalm is one which indisputably speaks of the Messiah. None other in the whole Book of Psalms does so more unmistakably, judged either by what it says, or by the interpretation given of it in the New Testament. Of the Messiah the Psalmist declares that He is to be a Priest, but no ordinary one; not even a High Priest, as known to Jewish ritual and worship; but a Priest who should be "after the order of," and on the same footing as, Melchizedek of old. Nothing more is added. The word stood in the Psalm for ages in its single and mysterious suggestiveness.

(2) If the oracle had merely said that Christ was a priest for ever, this would not have so fully met the necessities of the case. It would not have shown the inferiority of Abraham to Melchizedek, and the inferiority of the Aaronic priesthood to that of Melchizedek, and, consequently, to that of Christ. The object

was to prepare for the setting aside of the Aaronic priesthood as well as to establish the eternal priesthood of Christ. The peculiar mental attitude of the Jews seems to have rendered it necessary to put the oracle in this way. The most daring criticism will not deny that the Jewish religion, so impatient of any intrusion upon its ritual,—so increasingly impatient, they tell us, as time went on,—so resolute to keep its holy things in the hands of Israel, and within Israel in the hands of one tribe, and within Levi in the hands of a single family, nevertheless cherished in its bosom the death sentence of that system, in the announcement that the Divinely appointed priest, instituted by an oath of Jehovah, should belong to an alien priesthood, which could not officiate at their altars, perhaps Moabite, perhaps Canaanite, in any case unknown and unsanctioned by their law. Such a priest involved of necessity a change of the law against which his existence clashed. But we do not appreciate all the wonder of this evolution until we perceive that the promise of it was part of the creed of Judaism itself, and is implied in such a verse as this: Thou art a priest after the order of Melchizedek, not of Aaron. It is at least clear that the Psalmist meant to describe the Messiah as one who should possess a priesthood, and one older and more venerable than that of the Levitical Law.

¶ No aspect of our Lord's heavenly life is more to be insisted upon than His priestly office and work. Popular theology on all sides shows a tendency to stop short at the Cross, that is, at the historical moment when the Divine Sacrifice was offered. The blessings of our redemption are traced to the Passion with such exclusive insistence as to suggest that they would have been ours if Christ had neither risen from the dead nor ascended into heaven. The whole attitude of the Christian life is affected by this departure from the primitive teaching; a dead Christ instead of a living Lord becomes the object of devotion; the anchor of the soul is fixed in the past and not in the present and future. The error, as in many other instances, turns upon the disproportionate weight which is attached to certain familiar words of Holy Scripture, while others, which are necessary to preserve the balance of truth, are strangely overlooked. Thus the words, "It is finished," are supposed to exclude atoning work of any kind subsequent to the death of the Cross; whereas they only announce the completion of the particular work of obedience unto death which was the purpose of our Lord's earthly life. Neither

the analogy of the Old Testament Day of Atonement, nor the direct teaching of the New Testament, sanctions the doctrine that the priestly work of Christ was finished when He died. If He was delivered for our trespasses, He was raised for our justification; if we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more . . . shall we be saved by His life. With St. Paul not the Cross and Passion, but the Ascension and the High-priestly Intercession are the climax of our Lord's saving work.[1]

¶ Once when his servant read in the Psalms the verse, "I have sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a Priest for ever," Doctor Martin said, "That is the most beautiful and glorious verse in the whole Psalter; for herein God holds forth this Christ alone as our Bishop and High Priest, who Himself, and no other, without ceasing, makes intercession for His own with the Father. Not Caiaphas, nor Annas, nor Peter, nor Paul, nor the Pope; He, He alone shall be the Priest. This I affirm with an oath. 'Thou art a Priest for ever.' In that saying every syllable is greater than the whole Tower of Babel. To this Priest let us cling and cleave. For He is faithful; He has given Himself for us to God, and holds us dearer than His own life. When we stand firm to Christ, there is no other god in heaven or on earth but One who makes just and blessed. On the other hand, if we lose Him from our heart and eyes, there is no other help, comfort, or rest."[2]

When conquering Abram Salem sought
To God's High Priest his tithes he brought,
His thankfulness to mark:
Melchizedek an offering made,
Of Bread and Wine, on altar laid,
And blessed the Patriarch.

A victory nobler far we gain,
A nobler sacrifice is slain,
A better blessing shed:
Our great High Priest in Heaven stands,
Who gives Himself with His own hands,
In mystic Wine and Bread.[3]

2. The Epistle to the Hebrews is a golden key which unlocks many of the difficulties which meet us in the books of Moses. In the seventh chapter we find this remarkable language (vers. 1–3),

[1] H. B. Swete, *The Ascended Christ*, 49.
[2] Luther, *Table-Talk* (ed. Förstemann), i. 32.
[3] E. L. Blenkinsopp.

"This Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him, to whom also Abraham divided a tenth part of all (being first, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God), abideth a priest continually."

One of the main objects of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to establish, in a way to satisfy the Jewish converts of the time, the eternal priesthood of Christ. In no other part of the Word of God does this important subject receive formal discussion. And in no other part of the New Testament is the word "priest" applied to our Lord. His atonement and work are referred to elsewhere, but it is only here that He receives His official title of *Priest.* The writer aims not merely at establishing the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek over that of Aaron, but at bringing out its different and independent character, that character which belonged first and essentially to the High Priest of the Christian dispensation although it had been shadowed forth, as in a preparatory copy, in His Melchizedekean forerunner. In order, therefore, to understand the Priesthood of our Lord, we have to pass beyond the Old Testament arrangements for the Levitical priesthood, and to think of a still more ancient and famous "order." The writer eagerly lays hold of the Melchizedek priesthood, as a means of showing that Christ might be a priest, though not possessing the legal qualifications for the Levitical priesthood, represented in the oracle of Ps. cx. as of a different order, to which Jesus, as the Messiah, may lay claim. The new type is older than the Levitical, supposed alone to possess legitimacy; it is indeed the oldest type known to sacred history. But what if this order were only a rude, imperfect, irregular sort of priesthood, good enough for those old-world times, and graciously accepted by God in absence of a better, but destined to pass away when a regularly established priesthood came in, not worthy to continue side by side therewith, and not fit to be referred to as establishing a new sort of priesthood, claiming to supersede the Levitical? The possibility was present to the writer's mind, and he amply provides for it in his argument by unfolding the full significance

of the oracle in Ps. cx., pointing out that the priesthood of Melchizedek is there referred to, not as a rude, irregular, inferior sort of priesthood, the continuance of which, in times of established order, were absurd or impious, but as the highest sort of priesthood, the very ideal of priesthood, a priesthood fit for kings, as opposed to sacerdotal drudges. The Melchizedek priesthood, a distinct type, the most ancient, and, though ancient, yet not rude, but rather the better, and the best possible—such are the moments in the apologetic argument, which has for its aim to prove that the priesthood of Christ is at once real, and of ideal worth. The priesthood of Christ in its reality and ideal worth is not understood unless it is seen to be of the Melchizedek type.

(1) After the order of Melchizedek Jesus Christ has become the ideal High Priest *by the worth of His Personality, not by claim of descent* (Heb. vii. 1–3). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews beholds in the name "Melchizedek" a Divine revelation regarding the man, a revelation pregnant with the most important inferences as to both the person of whom he speaks and the ends to be attained by him. He was not merely a priest, but a priest-king. By his very name this Melchizedek, who had shadowed forth the Messiah to come, was "King of righteousness," and also "King of Salem, which is, King of peace." The two designations expressed alike what he was and that part which in the providence of God he had been raised up to play. Righteousness and peace met in him.

There can be little doubt, however, that the point mainly in the Apostle's mind is presented in the often-recurring phrase, "a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." The one statement is equivalent to the other: to be a priest for ever is to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. This is really the point of importance, because this "for ever" of the priesthood is the seal and guarantee of the finality of the priestly acts as sanctifying for ever the people (x. 10), and of the eternity of the covenant, and this last is the fundamental idea of the Epistle. This "for ever" belongs to the Melchizedek high priest in virtue of his indissoluble life, and this gain he has as the Son of God. So that the order of his priesthood resolves itself into the nature of his person.

The Levitical priest had carefully to trace his connexion with

Aaron, hence the elaborate genealogies of which some parts of the Bible are full. The priests, at the time of the return from Babylon, who could not prove their pedigree were suspended until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim. But earlier than Aaron, and moving in the mists of dim antiquity, is seen the arresting figure of Melchizedek, who, for aught that the Scriptures record to the contrary, holds his priesthood in perpetuity. He was independent of priestly pedigree. Of course, it is not necessary to infer that he really had no human parentage, and that he knew neither birth nor death. This is neither stated nor assumed. The argument is simply built on the omission of any reference to these events in ordinary human life, and aims at proving that, therefore, this old-world priesthood was quite independent of those conditions which were of prime importance in the Levitical dispensation. It was of an entirely different order from that which officiated in the Jewish Temple, and was, therefore, so capable of representing Christ's. What was allegorically true of Melchizedek was literally true of Jesus, who has had neither beginning of days nor end of life. His Priesthood, therefore, is utterly unique. He stands amongst men unrivalled. There have been none like Him before nor since—His functions derived from none, shared by none, transmitted to none.

¶ The foundation of our Lord's Priesthood is the constitution of His person, and not regularity of descent from others. No doubt it is "after the order of Melchizedek," but the peculiar language of the sacred writer is sufficient to prove that its fundamental ideas pass from our Lord to Melchizedek, and not from Melchizedek to our Lord. Melchizedek illustrates rather than lays down the principles of the line to which he belongs. These in their originality are to be found in the exalted and glorified Lord; and the first of them is that the heavenly High-Priest is what He is personally, not by succession. He is the Son, and this connexion between His Sonship and His heavenly Priesthood is brought out with remarkable force in the Epistle to the Hebrews. No truth appears more clearly upon the face of the whole Epistle than that neither the pre-existent nor the incarnate Sonship of our Lord (although both are proceeded on and implied), but His Sonship in His now glorified condition constitutes Him to be our High Priest. The two conceptions of Son and Priest cannot, in His case, be separated from each other. Because He was to be the High Priest of humanity He assumed

our human nature, and was afterwards elevated in that nature to the throne of the heavenly Majesty. Because He had assumed our human nature, and had been so elevated, He was fitted for His priestly function.[1]

Behold, Melchizedek!
And he who for himself and for his seed
Paid tithes to him, and he who thus bespake
His pious Father: "But where is the Lamb
For sacrifice?"—his dignity partake,
Humbly with Isaac and with Abraham,
The eternal priest bowed down in silent prayer.
Messiah thus—
"Ere Abraham was, I am!
And thou, thou priest of Salem, who while-ere
Greeted the faithful from his victory
With sacramental blessing;—thou wert he
Of th'everlasting Order and Decree,
Whence bread from Heaven, angelic food for man,
And life divine outpoured in blood. With thee
That sacramental ordinance began,
Accomplished now. Be thou a priest for ever;
I swear, nor shall repent. I will—I can—
After thine Order rule, and it shall never
In righteousness and peace, surcease to hold
Sway and dominion when and wheresoever."[2]

(2) After the order of Melchizedek Jesus Christ has become the ideal High Priest *by the greatness of His character, not by virtue of office* (vers. 4–10). Melchizedek's priestly authority in accepting the title from Abraham and bestowing upon him his blessing, evinced his personal greatness. Abraham's submission to Melchizedek in accepting his benediction, and his action in offering him, spontaneously, a tithe of the spoils, constitute his recognition of the priest-king's great personal religious worth. He who blesses is higher than he whom he blesses. Melchizedek was perhaps not a better or greater man than Abraham, but as a priest he took upon him to stand between God and Abraham, and on God's behalf blessed Abraham, the head and fount of Israel. And thus Melchizedek's priesthood is superior to that of the Levites—first, by as much as personal worth is higher than

[1] W. Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*, 97.
[2] J. A. Heraud.

privilege conferred by mere legal formula; and second, by as much as Abraham stands above his ordinary descendants.

If, then, priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is as incomparably greater than priesthood after the order of Aaron as greatness of character is superior to power of office, how infinitely better is Christ's priesthood (being of the former kind) than that of the Levitical priests. For His priesthood is spiritual, not legal; personal, not official; real, not professional; eternal, not transitory; not nominal, but ideal.

¶ It is clear that our Lord was not a priest in the same sense as the priests under the law; nor were His functions the same as theirs. He did not belong to the house of Aaron, to which the ancient priesthood exclusively appertained; He was never invested with sacerdotal insignia and honours; He never officiated at the altar in the Temple; He never offered up any animal as a sacrifice; He never, so far as we know, discharged any proper priestly function during the whole of His public ministry on earth. In this literal outward sense, then, He was not a priest.[1]

¶ Our Lord's Priesthood elevates into the spiritual sphere the ideas that were only outwardly and carnally expressed in Israel. Was the priest of the Jewish economy the property of God in a deeper sense than the ordinary Israelite? It was thus in the highest possible degree with Him of whom it was declared by the voice from Heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and who said of Himself, "I and my Father are one." Was it necessary that the Jewish priest should be free from every personal defect and uncleanness? Christ was "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners," One who was able to offer Himself "without blemish unto God." Did the priest of old require to be not only free from ceremonial defilement but to be positively cleansed? Christ could say of Himself, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him that sent me." Or, finally, were Israel's priests not only divinely appointed but consecrated to their office? Even upon earth Christ was not only the "Sent" of God, but was consecrated by the fullest and most perfect unction of that Spirit who descended upon Him at His Baptism, abode with Him then, and abides with Him for ever.[2]

(3) After the order of Melchizedek Jesus Christ had become the ideal High Priest *by the energy of His life, not by validity of*

[1] W. Lindsay Alexander, *System of Biblical Theology*, i. 440.

[2] W. Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*, 104.

law (vers. 11–17). The contrast is here: the Levitical or Aaronic priest is made priest according to a law; the Melchizedek priest becomes priest according to a power. An influence or regulation outside of the one makes him a priest, and he is a priest of a kind corresponding to this external law; a power inherent in the other makes him priest, and his priesthood corresponds to this power. The authority of the Divine law, given through Moses, constituted the priesthood of Aaron and his successors. On the foundation of this priesthood was enacted the ceremonial system with its lavers and altars, its offerings and sacrifices, its holy and holiest places, its ark, mercy-seat, and shekinah, all telling of access to God's presence so rigorously restricted that into it none might enter, even through rites so elaborate, save the high priest, once a year, and then for not many moments.

Rightly understood, the imposing ceremonials of Aaron's investiture spoke his doom, if only because they were ceremonials. The robes that were put upon him, breastplate and ephod and mitre, would some day be stripped off him again (Num. xx. 28), and were in themselves carnal and perishable things: the beginning implied the end of them. Melchizedek was a priest in that earlier and better age, when the qualifications fitting any one for the office were individual and personal rather than ceremonial, when the father of the family, when the head of the tribe, when perhaps even any single individual might act as priest, and might become the religious guide and counsellor of all who desired his aid.

¶ As the analogy of Melchizedek suggests, the Messiah differs in many respects from other high priests. He is, like Melchizedek, a unique Person, not a member of a sacerdotal caste, but the solitary representative of His order. Like Melchizedek, again, He has no successor, because He is endowed with an endless life, and His priesthood is perpetual. So it appears why the Psalm does not call him a priest "after the order of Aaron." The Aaronic order was a succession of dying men who administered a transitory system, whereas the Risen and Ascended Christ is alive for evermore, and all His acts have the note of an indissoluble vitality. Thus one utterance of the 110th Psalm sweeps away the whole structure of the Levitical ministry, substituting for it the undying life and work of the Royal Priest of the Gospel. It involves, on the one hand, the abolition of a Law which could bring nothing to perfection, and, on the other hand, the introduc-

tion into human life of something infinitely better, the great Hope through which we draw nigh to God in Christ. . . . A gospel which ended with the story of the Cross would have had all the elevating power of infinite pathos and love. But the power of an endless life would have been wanting. It is the abiding life of our High Priest which makes His atoning Sacrifice operative, and is the unfailing spring of the life of justification and grace in all His true members upon earth.[1]

3. It was as the father of *many nations* that Abraham stood and worshipped and received the benediction from Melchizedek's saintly hands. To share the benefit of the priesthood of Aaron's line a man must needs become a Jew, submitting to the initial rite of Judaism. None but Jewish names shone in that breastplate. Only Jewish wants or sins were borne upon those consecrated lips. But Melchizedek was the priest of humanity, not of Judaism alone. He belonged to a date when he could discharge the duties of a priesthood wide as the world, and when no member of the human family was excluded from the benefits of his priestly rule.

"Christ is the Priest of man. He draws all men unto Himself. He is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Ps. cx. 4. In Him a new religious foundation is laid, and this necessitates the removal of the former. When this exchange became completed the ceremonial system erected on the old basis of necessity fell to the ground. On the new foundation provided by the ideal priesthood of Christ another means of access to God is now prepared. God, then, may be approached by sinful men in their guilt and uncleanness not through mortal men, who discharged the duties of priesthood according to an external law expressed in a fleshly commandment, which regulated their fleshly descent, fleshly cleanness, and fleshly offerings, whose poor virtue could never reach the defiled conscience (Heb. ix. 14), but through the One perfected Person (Heb. v. 9), who for evermore fulfils the functions of the ideal priesthood according to the inherent virtue of His personal life, which He has proved to be indissoluble, by winning for Himself a victorious way through temptations, sufferings, and death, and gaining entrance into the very presence of God in the heavenly and unseen temple.

[1] H. B. Swete, *The Ascended Christ*, 38.

¶ As contrasted with the Levitical priestly service that of our Lord is universal. The blessings of the Levitical system were confined to Israel. No stranger, unless first naturalized, could share in them. Human feeling could flow only in the narrowest groove, and the effect produced upon the mass of the people, however inconsistent with the economy under which they lived, found expression in the words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy." With the Lord Jesus Christ as the Priest of the better covenant all differences between races and classes disappear. He is not like Aaron, the son of Israel: He is the Son of man. In Him there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female. Not indeed that the distinctions lying in nature and providence are in Him obliterated, or that His Church will be like a large garden, full it may be of luxuriance, but of luxuriance produced only by many thousand specimens of the same flower. In one sense all the old varieties will continue to exist, and the Greek, the Jew, the bond, the free, the male and female will still be marked by those peculiarities of position or of character which may show to what great division of the human race they belong. But all are saved in the same way. The fancied righteousness of the Jew does not profit him. The long-continued alienation of the Gentile does not injure him. The learned and the ignorant, the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor, meet in a brotherhood of equal privilege and gratitude and love. The same foundation is laid for all.[1]

¶ A Priest for all, He is also a Priest for every period of life. In childhood, youth, manhood, age, Christ is all and in all.

When, o'er the primrose path, with childish feet
We wander forth new wonderments to spell,
And, tired at length, to loving arms retreat
To hear some loving voice old tales retell:
We know Thee, Lord, as our Emmanuel,
Who, lying in a manger cold and bare,
Brought Christmas music on the midnight air.

When fiercely throbs the pulse, and youthful fire
Burns through the heart and kindles all the brain;
When overflows the cup of our desire
With beauty and romance, and all in vain
We strive the fulness of our joy to drain:
Thou art our Poet and our Lord of Love,
Who clothed the flowers and lit the stars above.

[1] W. Milligan, *The Ascension and Heavenly Priesthood of our Lord*, 108.

When, at life's noon, the sultry clouds of care
  Darken the footsteps of our pilgrim way,
And when, with failing heart, perforce we bear
  The heat and burden of the summer's day:
  Thou, Man of Sorrows, knowest our dismay,
And, treading 'neath the heavens' burning arch,
Thou art our Comrade in the toilsome march.

And when at length the sun sinks slowly west,
  And lengthening shadows steal across the sky;
When dim grey eyes yearn patiently for rest,
  And weary hearts for vanished faces sigh:
  Then Thou, the Lord of Hope art very nigh,
Thou, the great Conqueror in the ageless strife—
The Lord of Resurrection and of Life.[1]

[1] Gilbert Thomas, *The Wayside Altar*, 7.

ISAAC.

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ISAAC.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things to come.
—Heb. xi. 20.

1. ISAAC is one of those men who have never received justice from the readers of Bible history. This is not because anything very serious can be said against him, but because very little can be said about him, either good or bad. His fate is not to be criticized, it is to be ignored; it is not that people have a grudge against him, it is that they have no opinion about him. If one were required to write a sketch of Isaac and to subtract from it all that belongs to Abraham and all that must be assigned to Rebekah, there would be a very scanty balance. He appears in various striking scenes, but in each he is only a secondary figure —a mere accessory to the play. Sum up his record according to the Book of Genesis and it comes to this: at twenty-five Abraham would have sacrificed him; at forty Abraham married him; at sixty his sons were born; at a hundred and thirty-seven Jacob deceived him; and at a hundred and eighty he died. Add for the sake of completeness that Isaac was born, and you have all the features of this drab-coloured and characterless life.

Isaac is thus felt by every Bible-reader to be a much less commanding figure than the men who stand on either side of him —his father Abraham and his son Jacob. Abraham was a hero; he stands out conspicuously above the history of his time like a great mountain peak above the surrounding country. Jacob stands no less conspicuously above the other members of his family and the people of his time. Isaac's life was quiet. He impersonates, as it were, the peaceful, obedient, and submissive qualities of an equable trust in God, distinct alike from the transcendent faith of Abraham, and from that lower type which in Jacob was learned through discipline and purged from self-will.

He was peaceful, pleasant, harmless, useful, but in no sense romantic. There was not one thing in his life that in and of itself stirs the imagination. There was not a phase of his character the contemplation of which would lead one to an involuntary exclamation of admiration. Isaac is the representative of the unimportant but overwhelming majority, and his life and history stood to his descendants, and stand to us, for the glorification of the commonplace. A great master-brain, an Empire-making idealist in front; a daring, struggling, self-conquering hero behind Isaac is the plain man of business between them.

2. It was not without significance for the Israelites that the prehistoric founders of their race were not all of heroic mould. The ordinary materials of Hebrew life, as represented in Isaac and Jacob, were selected to be the channels of special revelation no less than the more splendid and striking personality of their father Abraham. Isaac was similar to the majority in every community, yielding, easy-going, stationary, content to receive the promise without realizing the extent or nature of the privilege. The events of his life are associated with a few localities, all (except Mamre, Gen. xxxv. 27–29) within a restricted area in S. Palestine. His encampments at Beer-lahai-roi, Gerar, and Beersheba form a sharp contrast to the varied scenes in the lives of Abraham and Jacob. The typical service of one of the patriarchs was rendered in quietness and sitting still.

¶ In the cave of Machpelah there are still to be seen six cenotaphs of the patriarchs of Israel and their wives. There are the monuments of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; of Sarah, of Rebekah, and of Leah. Of these there is one larger and more imposing than the others. Were we asked to say beforehand which this is, probably the universal voice would be—that of Abraham, the father of the faithful. And if, on being told that this was not so, we were asked again to select a name, we should probably select the name of Jacob, and give as our reason that he was the second father of the race, from whom the name of Israel came. There are few who do not receive with surprise the tidings that the most imposing of the monuments of Machpelah, in outward appearance, is that of Isaac. And the surprise increases when we learn that among the Jews there has always been an undercurrent of feeling to the same effect, and that for the name of Isaac they reserve their greatest honours

and their deepest reverence. Why this should be we can give no account. But it is certain that of the three patriarchs, and indeed of all characters in the Old Testament, Isaac is made in the New the most striking type of the Lord Jesus Christ.[1]

I.

The Son.

The character and career of Isaac would seem to tell us that it is possible to have too great a father. It was his fortune to be the favoured son of Abraham, to live from his early days in the presence of majestic virtue, and he had the drawback of his privileges. Abraham did so grandly that it was almost useless for Isaac to do at all; he was so able that Isaac was not expected to think; his faith was so comprehensive that it sheltered Isaac and smothered him. Abraham overshadowed Isaac; while the father lived there was no room for the son.

1. We find that God claimed Isaac from the beginning as His own. He was the child of promise. The first call of God to Abraham in Chaldæa was accompanied by a magnificent promise of a posterity that was to bless all the earth. This was afterwards enlarged by the declaration that his seed was to be as numerous as the stars of heaven. Somewhat later the promise was narrowed to the child of Sarah, "In *Isaac* shall thy seed be called." Born out of due time, when his father was an hundred years old and his mother ninety, the parents themselves "laughed" with almost incredulous joy at the thought of such a wondrous event. The name "Isaac," or "laughter," was fitly chosen by God with reference to the supernatural nature of his birth—the laughing joy which it brought to his father's tent.

Great must have been the privilege, in those days, of close and continuous contact with one so deeply religious as Abraham. It was Isaac's happy lot to have in his father one of God's specially chosen ones, and to have him almost wholly to himself, to be the main object of his care, with one exception his best-beloved, and his most constant companion. Good men have an

[1] J. E. Cumming, *Scripture Photographs*, 62.

atmosphere of piety around them which affects all who come within the sphere of their influence. Isaac dwelt in this atmosphere. Naturally, and without effort, he became partaker of those high thoughts concerning God which filled the patriarch's soul, shared his spirit of faith and of obedience, shared probably with him whatever knowledge God had vouchsafed him of the scheme of Redemption.

2. After Isaac's birth we are told of his weaning feast, and of the dismissal of Hagar and Ishmael at Sarah's bidding, sanctioned by God on the ground that Isaac was to be the father of Abraham's true offspring. At the time, Abraham was living at Beersheba. Then follows immediately what may be called the one distinctive event in the otherwise somewhat colourless life of Isaac—the sacrifice begun but not consummated on the unnamed mountain in "the land of Moriah."

There is no absolutely accurate date as to the birth of Isaac, but it is supposed, from the tenor of the narrative, that he was about twenty or twenty-five years old when he was led by his father to the summit of the mountain to be offered up as a sacrifice, as Abraham thought, in obedience to the will of God. The offering up of children was a common practice, growing out of superstition, in all the neighbouring nations, and in one way or another Abraham was made to believe that he was called of God to offer up his son Isaac.

Attention has been so much concentrated on Abraham's part in the tremendous scene, that Isaac's has scarcely attracted any great share of men's thought or consideration. But if the attitude of the father is grand, that of the son is not less so. Endurance is always more difficult than action. The father's faith and enthusiasm and zeal nerved him to an almost superhuman deed of devotion. But the son was set a harder task. He had to "suffer and be still." The sacrifice could not have taken place without Isaac's own consent. Isaac was young, Abraham old. Very likely, if it had been a question of physical strength, Isaac could easily have broken away. He had at least equal power with his father. Isaac meekly allowed himself to be laid upon the altar; whatever he was thinking, there was no resistance, there was no misunderstanding. Whatever the sacrifice was for the

father, it was certainly not less for the son: Abraham's *heart* was lacerated; but Isaac's *life* was in question.

¶ None of you, who have the least acquaintance with the general tenor of my own teaching, will suspect in me any bias towards the doctrine of vicarious Sacrifice, as it is taught by the modern Evangelical Preacher. But the great mystery of the idea of Sacrifice itself, which has been manifested as one united and solemn instinct by all thoughtful and affectionate races, since the wide world became peopled, is founded on the secret truth of benevolent energy which all men who have tried to gain it have learned—that you cannot save men from death but by facing it for them, nor from sin but by resisting it for them. It is, on the contrary, the favourite and the worst falsehood of modern infidel morality, that you serve your fellow-creatures best by getting a percentage out of their pockets, and will best provide for starving multitudes by regaling yourselves. Some day or other—probably now very soon—too probably by heavy afflictions of the State, we shall be taught that it is not so; and that all the true good and glory even in this world—not to speak of any that is to come, must be bought still, as it always has been, with our toil, and with our tears. That is the final doctrine, the inevitable one, not of Christianity only, but of all Heroic Faith and Heroic Being; and the first trial questions of a true soul to itself must always be,—Have I a religion, have I a country, have I a love, that I am ready to die for? That is the Doctrine of Sacrifice; the faith in which Isaac was bound, in which Iphigenia died, in which the great army of martyrs have suffered, and by which all victories in the cause of justice and happiness have been gained by the men who became more than conquerors through Him that loved them.[1]

3. Isaac believed that his death would, in some way he did not understand, further the good of his house and God's Kingdom, and so without more ado and without even striking an attitude, he offered himself. Few men have lived a more uneventful life, but none could have done more bravely. Here, if nowhere else in his modest career, was manhood, and gentleness,

> That gentleness,
> Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man.

He submitted to self-effacement for the sake of his family. That submission is the type of his whole life. He was always

[1] Ruskin, *Art of England*, i. 12, 13 (*Works*, xxxiii. 274).

bound to a domestic altar. From first to last he was offered up in sacrifice to the will of his family. Isaac's sacrifice was the requisite condition of his succession to Abraham's place; it was the only suitable celebration of his majority. A true resignation of self, in whatever outward form this resignation may appear, is required that we may become one with God in His holy purposes and in His eternal blessedness. There could be no doubt that Abraham had found a true heir, when Isaac laid himself on the altar and steadied his heart to receive the knife. Dearer to God, and of immeasurably greater value than any service, was this surrender of himself into the hand of his father and his God.

¶ Isaac might, had he so pleased, have resisted his father's will, and asserted his right to live and enjoy life. But he meekly allowed himself to be bound on the altar, and lay unresisting till the sacrificial knife was raised to slay him. In its great gallery of portraits, the Bible has nothing finer than this thoughtful, reverent, believing, obedient boy, so gentle and beautiful and innocent, yet in the grasp of God's grace so calm, so submissive, so strong to endure. Unless piety had struck its roots in him when he was a child, and grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength, he could never have endured his fiery trial. To find another instance of a Son voluntarily surrendering His life and laying Himself upon the altar at a Father's bidding, we have to go from Moriah to Calvary.[1]

II.

The Husband.

Before Abraham died, Isaac had fallen under the power of another masterful personality. Till he was forty years of age Isaac was under his father, from forty till Rebekah died he was under his wife; he was first Abraham's son, then he was Rebekah's husband; he was never Isaac, master of his life or of his household. He was ordered, cared for, managed, cheated all his days, because, although he had a delightful quality of his own which neither his father nor his wife had, he happened to be the son of a famous father, and the husband of a clever woman.

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 170.

1. There is hardly any Bible story as full of sweetness and beauty as the idyll of the heart which is connected with the marriage of Rebekah and Isaac, and but few which illustrate more clearly the reality of the guiding hand of a gracious God. Abraham had had experience of the domestic trouble and dissension which arise out of unequal marriages; but he felt, as having received the promises of God, that he was under obligation to honour Him, and that the marriage of his son with an idolater would be likely to turn the blessing into a curse and to thwart the Divine intentions concerning his race. So he made the faithful Eliezer swear that his son Isaac should not marry a Canaanitish woman, but should rather be united with one of his own kindred and one who shared his faith in Jehovah as the one living and true God. Worldly prudence might have whispered to him that a union with a family of some Canaanitish sheikh would be likely to ensure the possession of the territory by his grandchildren. But the religious considerations outweighed this, and Eliezer went forth to find the house of his master's brother, and among his daughters or granddaughters to find a fitting bride for Isaac. The camp of Abraham had been left three years without a lawful mistress. The tent of the mother had for that time been left without an occupant. Isaac, the heir of promise, was already forty years old. Most men, under such circumstances, would themselves have selected whom they would marry; but in this case Isaac was true to his reputation; his father picked out his wife for him. Abraham is not stated to have even consulted Isaac when he dispatched "his servant, the elder of his house" (Gen. xxiv. 2), to take a wife for his son from his country and kindred in Mesopotamia. Rebekah, the daughter of "Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother" (Gen. xxiv. 15), is brought from Mesopotamia by Abraham's servant. Isaac, we are told (Gen. xxiv. 62), dwelt at that time "in the land of the South," near Beer-lahai-roi.

Abraham's servant has performed his errand to perfection, and he is now nearing his young master's tent with Isaac's bride under his charge. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, there were camels coming." All that day Isaac had spent in prayer and meditation. He was greatly given to solitude and to

solitary thoughts, and he had much that day to think upon. When we see him in the fields at eventide he is a sad man, because he has lost his mother, and although he was forty years and more, his heart was in Sarah's grave. He had that tenacity of affection which is often wanting in the character of grander natures, and was not very conspicuous in that of Abraham, but which is the dower of quiet people. When Rebekah came as a gift from God, he took her into his mother's tent and gave her his mother's place in his heart.

In the lone field he walks at eventide,
To meditate beneath the open sky,
Where borne on lighter wings prayers upward fly,
And down from Heaven sweet answers swiftly glide.
But as he glanced around that landscape wide,
Far off a train of camels meets his eye,
And as they nearer come he can descry
A maiden veiled—his unseen, God-sent bride.
Thus while to Heaven thought after thought was rising,
The fair Rebekah step by step drew nigh,
With life's chief joy the prayerful saint surprising:
For those who think of Him God still is thinking,
With tender condescension from on high,
Some comfort ever to some duty linking.[1]

2. Isaac's marriage, though so promising in the outset, brought new trial into his life. Rebekah had to repeat the experience of Sarah. For twenty years Isaac and Rebekah were childless, though all their hopes depended on the birth of a son. This second barrenness in the prospective mother of the promised seed was as needful to all concerned as the first was; for the people of God cannot, any more than others, learn in one lesson. They must again be brought to a real dependence on God as the Giver of the heir. The prayer with which Isaac "intreated" the Lord for his wife "because she was barren" was a prayer of deeper intensity than he could have uttered had he merely remembered the story that had been told him of his own birth. God must be recognized again and again as the Giver of life to the promised line.

But in answer to prayer, God sent the barren Rebekah twin sons, who even in the womb foreshadowed the long fierce struggle of the peoples that would spring from them, and the victory of

[1] Richard Wilton.

the later born: Esau the hunter, slave of instinct and appetite; Jacob the shepherd, cunning indeed, but with his eye upon the unseen and the future, who won from Esau his birthright.

3. The placid life of Isaac glided peacefully away. Happy in his unalterable love for Rebekah, which never wavered, never wearied, never strayed from its first object, and happy in a warm affection for his sons, content to live a life without adventures and seldom enlivened by any change, Isaac passed a term of years, the length of which cannot be exactly measured, in the vicinity of Lahai-roi, while his sons grew to full manhood, but still remained inmates of his tent. In the district where he dwelt there was a famine, and Isaac, seeking food for his cattle, travelled into the land of the Philistines, to Gerar the capital, but was warned by God not to go down into Egypt. On the occasion of this theophany, Isaac is told of the blessing upon himself and his seed because of the obedience of his father Abraham.

4. In Gerar, Isaac imitated the timid ruse which his father is said to have practised on two similar occasions, once in Egypt (Gen. xii.) and again in Gerar (Gen. xx.), and evasively declared that Rebekah was his "sister." He was found out by Abimelech, the king of Gerar, who rebuked him for the deceit, and then charged his people not to molest him. Isaac had not a word to say in his defence. The man of God, the representative of the chosen race, stood rebuked by an uncircumcised Philistine, one outside the covenant, a mere heathen, probably an idolater. In his second trial Isaac had failed, had fallen; instead of maintaining the high standard of his youth, he had sunk to a lower level, and had given the enemies of Jehovah occasion to blaspheme.

It is needless to attempt to palliate Isaac's conduct, which does not seem to have greatly shocked the old narrators of Genesis. It is enough to observe that it would be a moral and theological anachronism to assume in the case of Isaac or of Abraham that strict sense of the obligation of veracity which belongs to a far more advanced stage of religious culture.

¶ Some moralists have tried to defend the falsehood that is prompted by love. But such a classical instance as that of Jeanie

Deans refusing to speak an untruth even to save her sister's life, will always commend itself to the moral sense. In any case, nothing can be said for the lie of base and selfish fear. Isaac could not even plead, as Abraham had feebly done, that his wife was his sister. He lied outright, and Abimelech reproved him with the stern accents of indignation. It must be admitted that there is a great deal of lying and prevarication in Genesis. But there is always some touch in the narrative which commends the true and condemns the false. The God of the Hebrews is "the God of things as they are." "Veracity and the kindred virtues are essentially and immutably good, and it is impossible and inconceivable that they should ever be vices and their opposites virtues." "They who tamper with veracity tamper with the vital forces of human progress."[1]

¶ Golightly delighted in teaching in the village school; and certainly he had the art of making his ministrations popular in the Parish Church. The children were required to commit to memory certain pithy proverbial sayings which had the merit of wrapping up Divine wisdom in small and attractive parcels. "Is *that* one of your boys?" (asked a lady with whom he was taking a drive near Oxford,—pointing to a lad who passed them). "I'll tell you in a moment. Come here, my boy." The boy approached the carriage. Golightly (leaning earnestly forward) —"Rather die?" . . . "Than tell a lie," was the instantaneous rejoinder. "Yes" (turning to his companion): "it is one of my boys."[2]

Many the guileless years the Patriarch spent,
  Bless'd in the wife a father's foresight chose;
  Many the prayers and gracious deeds, which rose
Daily thank-offerings from his pilgrim tent.
Yet these, though written in the heavens, are rent
  From out truth's lower roll, which sternly shows
  But one sad trespass at his history's close,
Father's, son's, mother's, and its punishment.
Not in their brightness, but their earthly stains
  Are the true seed vouchsafed to earthly eyes.
Sin can read sin, but dimly scans high grace,
So we move heavenward with averted face,
Scared into faith by warning of sin's pains;
  And Saints are lower'd, that the world may rise.[3]

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 24.
[2] J. W. Burgon, *Lives of Twelve Good Men*, i. xxvi.
[3] J. H. Newman.

5. From the time he first settled in Gerar Isaac prospered greatly. In this valley he found a number of wells, which had been digged in the days of Abraham, but which, since Abraham's death, had been stopped by the Philistines, who had filled them up with earth and rubbish. Isaac at once set himself to re-dig these old wells, and called them by the very names by which his father had called them. He thus not only honoured his father's memory, but also claimed his own rights as his father's heir.

The ill-feeling of the Philistines culminated in Abimelech's request that Isaac would depart; and Isaac removed his camp to a distance. His camping-grounds were marked by the successive digging of the wells Esek (Strife), Sitnah (Enmity), and Rehoboth (Room), which he so named because the men of Gerar quarrelled for possession of the former two, but not for the third. The patriarch finally removed to Beersheba. Jehovah appeared to him "in that night" (the night of his arrival), and promised him numerous offspring for Abraham's sake. He built an altar, pitched his tent, and dug a well there. And while encamped in this spot, he received overtures for an alliance with the Philistines. Abimelech the king, Ahuzzath "his friend," and Phicol the captain of the host, came over from Gerar; and Isaac made a covenant with them, and gave them a banquet. They plighted their faith to him by an oath; and on the day of their departure Isaac heard that his servants had come upon water in the well they were digging. Accordingly he gave the well the name of *Shibah*, as if equivalent to *Shebuah*; and thus the name Beersheba, according to one tradition, took its rise.

This scene in Isaac's history closes with his altar at Beersheba, and with the acknowledgment, even by the Philistines themselves, that Jehovah is with the man of faith. This was one of the first victories of gentleness and non-resistance ever won in this world. Isaac was not an Empire-builder like Abraham, not a great, pathetic, heroic figure like Jacob, he was a plain man of affairs. He stuck to his work as a sinker of wells, and for three thousand years men to whom Abraham was a legend and Jacob a hazy tradition have drunk of the sweet waters of Beersheba, and blessed the memory of the man who digged that well.

¶ Whenever a nation is in its right mind, it always has a deep sense of divinity in the gift of rain from heaven, filling its heart

with food and gladness; and all the more when that gift becomes gentle and perennial in the flowing of springs. It literally is not possible that any fruitful power of the Muses should be put forth upon a people which disdains their Helicon; still less is it possible that any Christian nation should grow up "tanquam lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum," which cannot recognize the lesson meant in their being told of the places where Rebekah was met;—where Rachel,—where Zipporah,—and she who was asked for water under Mount Gerizim by a Stranger, weary, who had nothing to draw with.[1]

¶ The noblest kind of sacrifice is the self-denial of those who have the clearest rights. Isaac was again and again placed in circumstances in which others would have quickly drawn the sword. The question arises whether he surrendered too much for the sake of peace. If a man cannot waive his rights without neglecting his duty, violating his conscience, surrendering his religion, losing his self-respect, betraying the rights of others, he is bound to resist. Otherwise he may yield, and scarcely any price is too high to pay for peace. Isaac was right. He is the first example in the Old Testament of the Christian or New Testament type of excellence. After him, as the Talmud says, "we find in the Bible many instances of the pleasure which meekness and humility in the creature afford the Creator. The noblest of our ancestors were those who were free from self-pride." Nothing can be saner or sweeter than this ancient tale, with its apparent moral for those who think that the strongest thing is to retaliate, to assert every claim, to cede no possible advantage. "The grandest thing in having rights is that, being our rights, we can give them up." "Why do ye not rather take wrong?"[2]

III.

The Father.

Isaac has been called "the Wordsworth of the Old Testament," but his meditative disposition seems to have degenerated into mere dreamy apathy, which at last made him the tool of the more active-minded members of his family, and was also attended by its common accompaniment of sensuality. It seems also to have brought him to a condition of almost entire bodily prostra-

[1] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, iv. 118 (*Works*, xx. 109).
[2] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 26.

tion, for a comparison of dates shows that he must have spent forty or fifty years in blindness and incapacity for all active duty.

There are some families whose miserable existence is almost entirely made up of malicious plottings and counter-plottings, little mischievous designs, and spiteful triumphs of one member or party in the family over the other. In the story before us we see the family whom God had blessed sunk to this low level and betrayed by family jealousies into unseemly strife on the most sacred ground. The history of this family seems like a grand drama, acted upon a small stage: we see the selfish fondness of Isaac for Esau, the unhappy partiality of Rebekah for Jacob, the carnal appetites of the elder brother, the over-reaching spirit of the younger. There is plot, and counter-plot, and rivalry, and stratagem, and strife—the whole array of those evil passions which prove that the heart of man is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

¶ What a contrast we have in Sir Walter Scott's family life. "In the social relations of life, where men are more effectually tried, no spot can be detected in him. He was a patient, dutiful, reverent son; a generous, compassionate, tender husband; an honest, careful, and most affectionate father. Never was a more virtuous or a happier fireside than his. The influence of his mighty genius shadowed it imperceptibly; his calm good sense, and his angelic sweetness of heart and temper, regulated and softened a strict but paternal discipline. His children, as they grew up, understood by degrees the high privilege of their birth; but the profoundest sense of his greatness never disturbed their confidence in his goodness. The buoyant play of his spirits made him sit young among the young; parent and son seemed to live in brotherhood together; and the chivalry of his imagination threw a certain air of courteous gallantry into his relations with his daughters, which gave a very peculiar grace to the fondness of their intercourse."[1]

1. During Isaac's stay at Gerar, his sons appear to have reached middle age. Esau was the first to enter into the estate of matrimony. Contrary to the wishes of both father and mother, he contracted marriages with women belonging to the idolatrous races of Canaan, which lay under the Divine displeasure, and were

[1] J. G. Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, ch. lxxxix.

about to forfeit their land on account of their iniquities. These unions were "a bitterness of spirit" to Isaac and Rebekah, who were totally opposed to any intermixture of the blood of the chosen race with that of the people whom God had appointed them to succeed. But here Isaac's lovely disposition came to his relief. Esau's wives, those Hittite women, were a grief of mind to Isaac, but he endured his mortification uncomplainingly.

2. When Isaac became very old, and was about to die, there occurred that scene of perfidy and craft which throws the light of interpretation somewhat upon Rebekah. Isaac, according to the custom and manner of the country, wished to bestow his blessing, and all the authority that went with it, upon his firstborn. Esau was his favourite son; not on account of any similarity between them, but just because they were dissimilar. The repose and contemplativeness and inactivity of Isaac found in the energy and even the recklessness of his firstborn a contrast in which it rested. That Isaac had some notion he was doing wrong in giving to Esau what belonged to God, and what God meant to give to Jacob, is shown from his precipitation in bestowing the blessing. He has no feeling that he is authorized by God, and therefore he cannot wait calmly till God should intimate, by unmistakable signs, that he is near his end; but, seized with a panic lest his favourite should somehow be left unblessed, he feels, in his nervous alarm, as if he were at the point of death, and, though destined to live for forty-three years longer, he calls Esau that he may hand over to him his dying testament. Isaac laid a net for his own feet. By his unrighteous and timorous haste he secured the defeat of his own long-cherished scheme. It was his hastening to bless Esau that drove Rebekah to checkmate him by winning the blessing for her favourite. The shock which Isaac felt when Esau came in and the fraud was discovered is easily understood. It was enough to rouse the anger of the mildest and godliest of men, but Isaac did not storm and protest—"he trembled very exceedingly." He recognized, by a spiritual insight quite unknown to Esau, that this was God's hand, and deliberately confirmed, with his eyes open, what he had done in blindness: "I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed." Isaac unhesitatingly yielded.

What a train of evils followed that day of deceit—Jacob, forced to flee from his father's house for his life, lest Esau should fulfil his threat; Rebekah, losing the son of her affection, probably dying before his return, and so never seeing him again; Esau, marrying an Ishmaelite, and living in Seir, far away from Gerar; Isaac, losing both sons, then bereaved of his wife; a blind man for fifty years, and for twenty of those years alone. When the saint falls, God makes him an example for many. When Adam sinned, he was cast out from Paradise. When Moses sinned at Meribah, he was kept out of the Holy Land. And Isaac, blind Isaac, beautiful and still soul, though, like us all, imperfect, treads the Holy Land, but sees it no more. Moses sees, but does not possess; Isaac possesses, but does not see.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Isaac is commended for his faith in blessing his sons. The "faith" of Isaac was seen in this: he believed that by virtue of the covenant the promise was sure to the seed. He believed, in accordance with a revelation from God, that he could convey it by solemn benediction. He was wrong in the application of the blessing which he would fain have conferred upon Esau; but "the blessing" was given in "faith," in full confidence that it would be fulfilled. The blessing was a prophecy of things to come, and he took the Divine word as evidence that the benediction would be accomplished to the letter.

¶ Ruskin was in the world, but no longer of it. He was alive, yet only waiting for the end. In 1891 his friend, the Bishop of Carlisle, was staying at Brantwood. The Bishop was to leave Brantwood at an early hour. Mr. Ruskin expressed a strong wish to take leave of him and Mrs. Goodwin, if they would not mind coming to his bedroom. As the departing guests came into the room to say good-bye, a look came over Ruskin's face as though he had expected something more than the ordinary leave-taking. There was a moment's silence. Then the Bishop, quickly understanding what was passing in the other's mind, raised his hands over him, and said, "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you peace both now and for evermore. Amen."[1]

[1] E. T. Cook, *The Life of Ruskin*, ii. 532.

IV.

The Character of Isaac.

Once more only do we hear of Isaac; and that is when we read of his death, after the return of Jacob from his twenty-one years' sojourn in Mesopotamia. The mention of it occurs just after the enumeration of Jacob's twelve sons; and we then read that "Jacob came unto Isaac his father to Mamre, to Kiriath-arba (the same is Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac sojourned." Here Isaac died, being 180 years old, and his two sons Esau and Jacob buried him (Gen. xxxv. 27–29).

1. Isaac is unheroic; he is far nearer than Abraham to the level of ordinary humanity. He is devoid of any stern sense of the duty of veracity. He likes "creature comforts," and unduly favours the son who provides them for him.

2. Religious feeling is far less prominent in Isaac than in Abraham. Isaac certainly remained all his life a faithful worshipper of the God of Abraham, believed in the promises which Abraham had received from God, obeyed God's will when it was clearly signified to him (Gen. xxvi. 2–6), and looked to God as the source whence proceeded every blessing (Gen. xxv. 21, xxvii. 27, 28, xxviii. 3). He had no leaning to idolatry, even in its mildest forms, no inclination to desert the worship of Jehovah for that of "the gods of the nations." But he is not presented to us as an eminently religious man. He has no special title, like that given to Abraham—"the friend of God."

3. No formal eulogy is bestowed upon Isaac, either in Genesis or in the rest of Scripture. He is, like his son Jacob, "a plain man" (Gen. xxv. 7). He has many virtues and graces—faith (Heb. xi. 20), obedience (Gen. xxii. 6–9), affectionateness (Gen. xxiv. 67, xxv. 28, xxvii. 27, 33), conjugal fidelity, gentleness; but he is not among the foremost of the Bible saints. His goodness is passive rather than active, draws forth our sympathy rather than our admiration. Still, there is something peculiarly touching and attractive about his character. Self-effacement is

perhaps the most succinct form in which to express it. That was an extraordinary characteristic for the times in which he lived, when men fought on the merest pretext, and Isaac was strong enough to fight. He taught the men of that time a deep and abiding lesson, which perhaps only a man of his temperament could teach, viz., that the servant of Jehovah, the God of Abraham, was not a fighting man, taking things from other people without their consent, brow-beating and coercing, living in their land whether they would or not—armed with Jehovah's power to conquer and oust men. The servant of Jehovah was meek and gentle, blameless and harmless.

¶ I have spoken to some of you of one grace that seems to me pre-eminent amid all the band of Christian graces; it stands out alone, for it alone belongs to, and is possible only to, the Christian soul. Angels cannot wear it, it is yours and mine alone. What is that grace? It is the sacred mark imprinted by Him upon my forehead and yours, with a holy kiss, that He may know throughout eternity His own whom He loved unto death. It is the grace of meekness. What means that word meekness? It is, I know, reverent and adoring humility; but that alone is not meekness. It is humility shot through and through with the sense of the evil and the mystery of sin, and of the gratitude we owe to that measureless love that saves from sin. It is humility bedewed with penitence, but radiant too with the calm light of peace and joy. Think not that meekness is a weak thing. Some of you have thought it so; think not so any more. It bows humbly before Him whose love has been love unto death, and who has lifted us up out of death to share His unconquerable life. But before the world its meaning is changed. Before the world with its seductions and deadly power, the meekness of the man of God is a courage that knows no fear, a strength that will never bend; it is the meek who shall inherit, and conquer, the earth. Brethren, I long, as I look to the few years or days that remain, I long to have more of this grace above all others.[1]

[1] J. B. Paton, in *Life* by J. Marchant, 10.

REBEKAH.

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REBEKAH.

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.—Gen. xxiv. 67.

THE character of Rebekah, as maid, wife, and mother, is drawn with perfect consistency and liveliness of delineation in the Book of Genesis. The story, with the exception of a few trifling details, is derived from the most picturesque and human of the sources of the book, the author whom we know as J. Appearing first as a pure, unselfish, loving girl, she becomes a woman of great strength of mind and depth of character. She is clever, active, energetic. She can make plans and carry them out, give orders and expect them to be obeyed, but her masterful spirit cannot brook opposition or contradiction. Esau's wives vex her beyond measure. When she loves, she loves with all her soul, and will spare no pains, consider no consequences, nor grudge any sacrifice for those she loves. "Upon me be thy curse, my son" (Gen. xxvii. 13), is her answer to Jacob when he fears that a curse will fall on his deception. Although that curse fell and her beloved son had to flee and she saw his face no more, yet we forget the scheming, plotting woman in the loving wife and self-sacrificing mother.

I.

REBEKAH AS MAID.

1. Sarah is dead. The patriarch has been bereaved of the fair wife of his youth, and three whole years are devoted to mourning the loved and lost. Her death warns Abraham of the passing away of his own generation, and recalls him to the duty of providing for the permanence of the chosen seed. Anxious to

find a wife for Isaac, that his line may be perpetuated, the patriarch sends his confidential servant, Eliezer, to Padan-aram, to his own kindred, in search of a fitting helpmeet for his son. Isaac must not be "unequally yoked" with one of the daughters of the land; and the man is made to swear that he will not seek a wife for him among any of the tribes of Canaan, and that he will not take him back to the land of his kindred beyond the Euphrates.

So the servant went to Nahor, arriving in the evening when the women came to fetch water from the well, and prayed for a sign to guide him to the right girl among the maidens. "And behold, Rebekah came out with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon." All unconscious of being watched with any particular interest, this good-looking girl filled her pitcher and came up with it, when suddenly the stranger hastened towards her and requested a drink of water. There was nothing remarkable in that either, for travellers often asked a similar favour, but did not always receive such a ready and cheerful response, as the incident at Sychar's well showed (John iv. 6–9). It was unusually considerate and gracious of Rebekah to offer to draw water for the camels, as there were ten of these to supply, and her pitcher would need filling many times before they were all satisfied, yet she did it as gladly as if she had known what was involved in her action.

In this remarkable providence Eliezer sees an answer to his prayer; and feeling that the Lord had made his journey prosperous and that so far He had ordered his steps, and without pausing to inquire of what lineage she came, but perfectly satisfied, he presents the gifts which the usage of the time warranted. He "took a golden ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; and said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee. Is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in." Overcome with so evident a proof of the Lord's marvellous guidance the old man bows his head, and worships. "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the

house of my master's brethren." Struck with his profound devotion, hearing him mention the name of Abraham, and hearing him also say that he has been "led to the house of his master's brethren," the maiden hastens home to communicate the strange intelligence, and to tell them of her mother's house these things. She carries back upon her person the rich gifts which she has received. These were love-tokens from the man who seeks her hand, and who would woo and win her as his bride.

¶ The beauty of such actions as Rebekah's lies in the fact that the doer of them sees nothing to admire. They are little nothings —"nameless unremembered acts of kindness and of love." But some day they fix one's destiny. Trivial things both make and reveal character. "Trifles!" said a very great man, "perfection is made out of trifles, and perfection is not a trifle." Rebekah was never more lovely than when she was completing her self-imposed task at the well. Kindness in the heart is light in the eyes, music in the voice, grace in the motions. The first element of vital beauty, as Ruskin says, is "the kindness and unselfish fulness of heart which receives the utmost amount of pleasure from the happiness of all things."[1]

2. One is struck by the swiftness with which everything in this incident was done. When the servant saw Rebekah he ran to meet her; Rebekah hastened with her pitcher, and ran again to the well to replenish it; and after she had assured the stranger that her people had straw and provender enough for him, and room to lodge in, and after she had received his present of a golden ring and two bracelets, she ran to tell her mother. Laban, too, ran out to meet Abraham's servant, and when he saw the ring and the bracelets which had been given to his sister, he said, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?"

3. All that follows is equally interesting. The zeal and persuasiveness of Eliezer as he tells his story to Rebekah's mother and her brother Laban; the decision that she should go and become the wife of Isaac—a decision evidently come to without consulting Rebekah herself, for it was only when Eliezer urged immediate departure that it was agreed to refer the matter to her. "And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go"—an indication of that

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 187.

practical-mindedness and decision of character which come out later on.

Although Rebekah does not seem to have taken long to make up her mind, she must have felt that this was a serious question to face, for her whole future would be affected by the answer she gave. Evidence is forthcoming in our own day of the existence of a strong and prosperous nation in this part of the world, the people of the Hittites among whom the family of Rebekah dwelt. And if she had cared, she might easily have made a better match from a worldly point of view than her marriage with Isaac. What, then, was the determining factor and influence? Why was it that when the question was put to Rebekah, "Wilt thou go with this man?" there was no hesitation about her reply? Unquestionably it was this, that she saw the hand of God in it: her decision rested upon a religious basis; what turned the scale was the fact that the son of her grand-uncle, Abraham, had been trained in the fear of Jehovah. She felt that her race, which was also his race, had in it that which would survive the brilliant trappings of the Hittites and bequeath an heirloom to posterity which they were powerless to bestow. That was what far-seeing Rebekah thought, and it became the dominant thought of her life. She stands before us at this time and at all times as a woman of caste. Hers is not the caste of birth, of station, of wealth, or even of learning. It is the caste of religious faith. She would have recoiled from no poverty. She would have shrunk from no manner of toil. She would have despised no alliance of an inferior degree. But to unite with a worshipper of another God, to join matrimonial hands with an idolater, this was the revulsion of her soul. And so from Rebekah's gaze all Hittite offers fade; and the figure of the Hebrew Isaac stands triumphant. This woman presents us with a fair and beautiful pattern of faith.

What girl
Now reads in her bosom as clear
As Rebekah read, when she sate
At eve by the palm-shaded well?
Who guards in her breast
As deep, as pellucid a spring
Of feeling, as tranquil, as sure?[1]

[1] Matthew Arnold.

4. We have a charming picture of the end of the journey. "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide," and he saw the cavalcade approaching. Rebekah saw him. Her behaviour was excellent. With the graceful ingenuousness and promptitude which characterized her, she did the right thing at the right moment, alighting from her camel, and veiling herself. It was love at first sight. Isaac understood that it was no unworthy maiden who was to be his wife; and he "brought her into his mother Sarah's tent," a sacred place to him; "and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

¶ Stanley's life was fuller and more crowded than it had ever been before! but his marriage made the increased burden light, for it brought out the strength and dignity of his character, while it restored the lightness and vivacity of earlier times. He drew fresh vigour from the companionship of a wife who made herself one with him to an extraordinary degree, who threw herself heart and soul into all his work and aspirations, whose power of understanding others was as strong as it was quick, and whose sympathy was at once ready and real, wide yet always individual, tender but at the same time intensely practical. . . . Gay, cheerful, keenly enjoying life, she inspired brightness and hope by her presence. Helpful to all with whom she came in contact, full of kindly thought for every one but herself, she was one of those women on whom her friends knew that they could count, with a certainty that she would not fail. The simple, easy, genuine courtesy with which she received all who came to her house was never omitted from hurry or from preoccupation. The small acts of thoughtful kindness, which are especially grateful to the humble or obscure, were never neglected, and her gracious welcome, extended alike to all ranks—to the uninteresting as well as to the interesting—filled the Deanery with an atmosphere of sunshine.[1]

But Isaac also
Walking in the field,
Saw from afar
A company that came,
Camels, and a seat
As where a woman sat;
Wherefore he came
And met them on the way.

[1] R. E. Prothero, *Life of Dean Stanley*, ii. 344.

Whom when Rebekah
Saw, she came before
Saying, Behold
The handmaid of my lord
Who for my lord's sake
Travel from my land.
But he said, O
Thou blessed of our God,
Come, for the tent
Is eager for thy face.
Shall not thy husband
Be unto thee more than
Hundreds of kinsmen
Living in thy land?
And Eleazer answered,
Thus and thus
Even according
As thy father bade
Did we; and thus and
Thus it came to pass.
Lo! is not this
Rebekah, Bethuel's child?
And as he ended
Isaac spoke and said,
Truly my heart
Went with you on the way,
When with the beasts
Ye came unto the place.
Truly, O child
Of Nahor, I was there,
When to thy mother
And thy mother's son
Thou madest answer,
Saying I will go.
And Isaac brought her
To his mother's tent.[1]

5. Isaac had no idea of Rebekah's character; he could only yield himself to God's knowledge of what he needed; and so there came to him, from a country he had never seen, a helpmeet singularly adapted to his own character. One cannot read of her lively, bustling, almost forward, but obliging and generous conduct at the well, or of her prompt, impulsive departure to an unknown

[1] A. H. Clough.

land, without seeing, as no doubt Eliezer very quickly saw, that this was exactly the woman for Isaac. In this eager, ardent, active, enterprising spirit, his own retiring and contemplative, if not sombre, disposition found its appropriate relief and stimulus. Hers was a spirit which might indeed, with so mild a lord, take more of the management of affairs than was befitting; and when the wear and tear of life had tamed down the girlish vivacity with which she spoke to Eliezer at the well, and leapt from the camel to meet her lord, her active-mindedness does appear in the disagreeable shape of the clever scheming of the mother of a family. In her sons you see her qualities exaggerated: from her Esau derived his activity and open-handedness, and in Jacob you find that her self-reliant and unscrupulous management has become a self-asserting craft which leads him into much trouble, if it also sometimes gets him out of difficulties. But such as Rebekah was, she was quite the woman to Isaac attract and supplement his character.

¶ "Each fulfils defect in each"—the passive, pensive, patient Isaac; the ardent, eager Rebekah. *L'allegra* weds *il penseroso.* The providence of God, the sanction of parents, the approval of friends, community of faith, manly virtues, maidenly graces, conspire to bless their union; Heaven's gift of love makes them one; and they are faithful unto death. Nothing could more clearly indicate the essential greatness of the Hebrew race than the fact that such pure and lofty ideals were conceived and realized. To quote Ewald, "The fair type of matrimony presented in the story of Isaac and Rebekah does no more than represent with little alteration marriage as it really existed in the majority of families in the best days of the nation. And here we may clearly see the mighty working of an elevated religion."[1]

II.

Rebekah as Wife.

1. Now the scene changes, and we have Rebekah the wife in her new home. Her influence in the house was that of a compensation. The heart of Isaac had been overshadowed by the death of Sarah; Rebekah crept into the vacant spot and rekindled

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 193.

the ashes on the scene of the vanished fire. The home life was happy. Isaac and Rebekah were happy in each other's love.

¶ There were certain rules which I formulated for my married life, before I was married or even engaged. I have carried them out ever since my wedding day, and the experience of all these years has abundantly demonstrated their value. The first was, never to have any secrets from my husband in anything that affected our mutual relationship, or the interest of the family. The confidence of others in spiritual matters I did not consider as coming under this category, but as being the secrets of others, and therefore not my property. The second rule was, never to have two purses, thus avoiding even the temptation of having any secrets of a domestic character. My third principle was that, in matters where there was any difference of opinion, I would show my husband my views and the reasons on which they were based, and try to convince in favour of my way of looking at the subject. This generally resulted either in his being converted to my views, or in my being converted to his, either result securing unity of thought and action. My fourth rule was, in cases of differences of opinion never to argue in the presence of the children. I thought it better even to submit at the time to what I might consider as mistaken judgment, rather than have a controversy before them. But, of course, when such occasions arose, I took the first opportunity for arguing the matter out. My subsequent experience has abundantly proved to me the wisdom of this course.[1]

2. But something happened that altered things a little. Famine visited their home at Beersheba, and, just as in the case of Abraham, they were compelled to go farther south towards Egypt. They sojourned at Gerar, the territory of the Philistine king Abimelech. Isaac thought a great deal of his wife, of her charms, of her beauty; so much so that he fancied every man would fall in love with her; and, more concerned for his own safety than for his wife's honour, he endeavoured to pass her off as his sister.

Two defects were shown in his character through this incident —defective faith in God and a spirit of craven fear—and in a woman of Rebekah's temperament and religious faith they both counted for much. Did she then lose faith in Isaac after this? Did it bring discord into the home and a measure of alienation? We do not know. We have no evidence that it did; but it

[1] *Life of Catherine Booth*, i. 96.

certainly made easier for Rebekah the deception she practised later in order to secure the blessing for her son Jacob. The Gerar incident might be forgiven, it could not be forgotten.

¶ Every life is a profession of faith, and exercises an inevitable and silent propaganda. As far as lies in its power, it tends to transform the universe and humanity into its own image. Thus we have all a cure of souls. Every man is a centre of perpetual radiation like a luminous body; he is, as it were, a beacon which entices a ship upon the rocks if it does not guide it into port. Every man is a priest, even involuntarily; his conduct is an unspoken sermon, which is forever preaching to others;—but there are priests of Baal, of Moloch, and of all the false gods. Such is the high importance of example. Thence comes the terrible responsibility which weighs upon us all. An evil example is a spiritual poison; it is the proclamation of a sacrilegious faith, of an impure God. Sin would be only an evil for him who commits it, were it not a crime towards the weak brethren, whom it corrupts. Therefore it has been said, "It were better for a man not to have been born than to offend one of these little ones."[1]

III.

Rebekah as Mother.

1. It is not given to many women to know beforehand what their children will be or do, and although we may think it would be an immense advantage if they did know, and a help in training the children, we must admit that the use Rebekah made of her knowledge does not favour such a theory.

Rebekah was assured that she would have two sons, and that each of them would be the progenitor of a nation; but there was to be a reversal of the natural order: the nation sprung from the younger son would have the lordship over the nation sprung from the elder. This oracle of Jehovah, the mother, as we shall see, treasured in her heart. And when the two boys were born, she, not without thought of the Divine election, centred her hopes and her affections, not on Esau, the firstborn, the strong man of his hands, but on Jacob his brother, a gentler, and, to other eyes, far less attractive type of man. And when they were grown she had so indoctrinated the younger with the idea that he would take

[1] *Amiel's Journal* (trans. by Mrs. Humphry Ward).

precedence of the elder brother, that Jacob took the first opportunity to purchase from Esau that birthright which he believed by Divine foreknowledge was assigned to him.

¶ Mother and son were drawn to each other by strong affinities. She saw in his patience, his self-control, his spiritual leanings, the promise of great and good things. She hoped much from his mother-wit—the cleverness he inherited from herself. In many ways he was happy, in some not so happy, in having such a mother, who fostered in his mind the love of high things, and stirred him to act a great, if not always a noble, part. Her influence over her son in the formative years of his life was incalculable.[1]

2. Rebekah has all a mother's love for Jacob, but seems a little hard and cold to Esau. She reverences her husband as the mouthpiece of the Almighty, and yet studies how to deceive him when He who knows all things is most obviously with him. She believes in God's word, or at least in that one of His words which flatters her inclination; but she cannot trust Him to fulfil it without her help, and so commits a gross and terrible sin in order to secure its fulfilment. Rebekah's love ought to have made Jacob honourable and true, but she forgot the high commission which mothers have, and became the temptress of her boy. It was an awful thing for even love to say, "Upon me be thy curse." Together they deceived Isaac in his old age, and the lad who had stolen his brother's birthright, now by fraud to which he was instigated by his mother, stole from his father the elder son's blessing. That bold stroke teaches us, among other suggestive lessons, that it was not to Isaac, the slave of the sworn faith, or to Abraham that Jacob owed his natural deceitfulness, but that in this he was truly his mother's son. When he had fled from Beersheba and sought refuge in Haran, he found in his maternal uncle Laban a man able to understand him and to deal with him as he himself so well knew how to deal with others. Rebekah and Laban explain, and to a certain extent are an excuse for, the character of Jacob.

¶ Rebekah is a fascinating woman, with a clever, eager, inventive mind; with a genius for laying plans and overcoming difficulties; accustomed to give orders and to be obeyed; ready to

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 18.

make any sacrifices for those whom she loves; but impatient of opposition, and vexed beyond measure and weary of life itself when she has to deal with things beyond her comprehension, or simply to submit to the inevitable. It is impossible to question the strength of her mother-love. We tremble at the audacity of her wild words: "Upon me be thy curse, my son." She is reckless of personal consequences if so be she can secure a coveted distinction for her son. He is dearer to her than her own soul. It is no mean advantage that she desires for him; it is a covenant blessing, a heritage of spiritual promises; and she believes it is God's will that he should obtain this privilege. But neither a high purpose nor a great love ever consecrates the use of dishonourable means; and Rebekah, with all her charm, must be numbered among those mothers who love not wisely but too well.[1]

Oh dangerous wiles of cunning! at what cost
Ye gain faith's prize! Too eager to procure,
Ye try by human artifice to ensure
What, if God-promised, never can be lost.
Faith's frail-barked freight must needs be tempest-tossed.
Trust, loving confidence, patience to endure
Pain, peril, toil, and charms of lust's allure,
Untwine life's tangled thread when tangled most.
Birthright and blessing subtly gained involve
Postponement of the promise, hindrance, snares,
Hard service, disappointment, fraud, deceit.
Shifts implicate with evil, do not solve.
Subtlety for subtleties faith's way prepares.
Ourselves are treated as we others treat.[2]

3. Nothing that can be said can clear Rebekah from blame, and she had to reckon with the consequences of her sin; for Esau resolved to have revenge upon Jacob, and so the mother had to devise another plan to save his life. The only wise course was that of sending him away from home altogether. Thus she suggested to her husband the desirability of making sure that Jacob should not "take a wife of the daughters of Heth"! Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"

There is traceable here one of the defects of Rebekah's char-

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 30.
[2] T. A. Walker, *Meditations in Sonnet Verse*.

acter—a tendency to exaggeration in expression, to say things somewhat in advance of her real feelings; yet do not let us forget that the last glimpse we get of her reveals the anxiety of the mother for the well-being of both her children. She thought and believed the separation was to be but for a short time. "Tarry with Laban a few days," she said to her son privately, "until thy brother's fury turn away; . . . then I will send, and fetch thee from thence"; but the days lengthened into years, and long before the return of her favourite son, Rebekah was laid to rest in the grave at Machpelah.

¶ My grandmother's son, Walter, had gone forth from her, in prosecution of his calling, had corresponded with her from various counties in England, and then had suddenly disappeared; and no sign came to her, whether he was dead or alive. The mother-heart in her clung to the hope of his return; every night she prayed for that happy event, and before closing the door, threw it wide open, and peered into the darkness with a cry, "Come hame, my boy Walter, your mither wearies sair"; and every morning, at early break of day, for a period of more than twenty years, she toddled up from her cottage door, at Johnsfield, Lockerbie, to a little round hill, called the "Corbie Dykes," and, gazing with tear-filled eyes towards the south for the form of her returning boy, prayed the Lord God to keep him safe and restore him to her yet again. Always, as I think upon that scene, my heart finds consolation in reflecting that, if not here, then for certain there, such deathless longing love will be rewarded, and, rushing into long-delayed embrace will exclaim, "Was lost and is found."[1]

The sunset falls on Isaac's tent—
    And all the glowing Syrian sky
    Is flooded with a mingled dye
Of gold, and faintest crimson blent.

But never more at evening's close
    Her loved son's voice Rebekah hears;
    That was a true chord to her ears
More sweet than any music knows.

And he that shared her fond deceit
    That could not wait the appointed time,
    He feels, by night, the frosty rime,
By day, the summer's noon-tide heat.

[1] *John G. Paton: An Autobiography*, i. 15.

An exile in another land;
And never more his head to rest
Upon a mother's patient breast,
And never feel her soothing hand.[1]

4. Thus severely was the sin of Rebekah and Jacob punished. It coloured their whole after-life with a dark, sombre hue. It was marked thus, because it was a sin by all means to be avoided, It was virtually the sin of blaming God for forgetting His promise. or of accusing Him of being unable to perform it. Yet this woman's sin was not, as most sins are, the fall *from* an habitual path of righteousness; it was a fall *in* her habitual path of righteousness. David fell by revolt from God; Solomon fell by forgetting God; but Rebekah fell by fanaticism for God. Sinners are usually conscious rebels against the Divine will; but Rebekah's darkest deed came from the sense that she was obeying the Divine will. She never dreamed that she was working for any end but the cause of Providence. She was wrong, as Saul of Tarsus was wrong, as hundreds of persecutors have been wrong; but the light which blinded was a supposed light from heaven. All through her life this woman never wavered in her purpose. It was her refusal to waver that made her stumble. She wanted to present to God a soul of her own house who would keep unblemished the priesthood of her race. She fell by the weight of the very burden which she believed she was carrying for Him.

¶ As might be expected from his general speculative views Browning regards the effect which our volitions produce upon our environment as of no importance whatever. It is for the volition itself that he cares, and not for the results that follow from it. The Utilitarian passes judgment upon a man's action according to the amount of pleasurable or painful feeling which it causes; but Browning, whose attention is concentrated throughout upon the eternal soul, ignores the physical act altogether, and declares, with Kant, that from the point of view of ethics, "the good-will is the only unconditioned good."[2]

¶ Often it is the safest way to shut the eyes and be half-blind to many things in a friend's character, which must be taken as it is, for better for worse; but in ——'s character I am grateful to find that his perfect transparency reveals only the more delicately

[1] C. F. Alexander, *Poems on Subjects in the Old Testament.*
[2] A. C. Pigou, *Browning as a Religious Teacher*, 110.

the moss-fibres, which are not blemishes but beauties in the rock-crystal. I was prepared to discover many faults, but I was not prepared to find that the very faults and the things which disappoint will bear the magnifying-glass and only give fresh insight into a character which perfectly astonishes me by its exquisite delicacy. I do verily believe that his imperfections are like pearls in the sea-shell—aberrations from healthful nature, if you will, but more tender and tinted with heavenlier iridescence than even the natural shell itself.[1]

[1] *Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson*, 182.

JACOB.

I.

The Supplanter.

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JACOB THE SUPPLANTER.

Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing.—Gen. xxvii. 36.

ABRAHAM was a hero, Jacob was "a plain man, dwelling in tents." Abraham we feel to be above ourselves, Jacob to be like ourselves. Thus the distinction between the two great patriarchs has been drawn by a celebrated theologian. "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." Thus the experience of Israel himself is summed up in the close of his life. Human cares, jealousies, sorrows, cast their shade over the scene,—the golden dawn of the patriarchal age is overcast; there is no longer the same unwavering faith; we are no longer in communion with the "High Father," the "Friend of God"; we at times almost doubt whether we are not with His enemy. But for this very reason the interest attaching to Jacob, though of a less lofty and universal kind, is more touching, more penetrating, more attractive. Nothing but the perverse attempt to demand perfection of what is held before us as imperfect could blind us to the exquisite truthfulness which marks the delineation of the patriarch's character.

The Jews called themselves by the name of Jacob; and surnamed themselves by the name of Israel (Isa. xliv. 5). God calls them children of Israel. We call them Israelites. We speak of Jacob, rather than Abraham, as the founder of the people to which he gave his name; because, though Abraham was their ancestor, yet he was not so exclusively. He is the founder of a yet richer, mightier line. The wild son of the desert claims him as father equally with the bargain-loving Jew. But Jacob is the typical Jew. His life is the epitome of that wonderful

people, who are found in every country and belong to none; who supply us with our loftiest religious literature, and are yet a byword for their craft, their scheming, and their love of money.

If we can understand the life of Jacob, we can understand the history of his people. The extremes which startle us in them are all in him. Like them, he is the most successful schemer of his times; and, like them, he has that deep spirituality and that far-seeing faith, which are the grandest of all qualities, and make a man capable of the highest culture that a human spirit can receive. Like them, he spends the greatest part of his life in exile, and amid trying conditions of toil and sorrow; and, like them, he is inalienably attached to that dear land, his only hold on which was by the promise of God and the graves of the heroic dead.

I.

The Stolen Birthright.

1. For twenty years Isaac and Rebekah had no children, and it seemed to many that the Divine promise that in Isaac's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed was about to fail. Isaac prayed to God, however, and God gave him not one, but two sons—twins. The elder was called Esau, which meant "hairy"; the younger Jacob, which meant "taken by the heel," or "supplanter," a name actually given to him in Genesis. It was the right name, for if ever a man tried to trip and supplant another, it was Jacob in dealing with his brother. From the very beginning he seems to have had either some inward presentiment of his destiny, or else some resentment against the fate which deprived him of the birthright by the seeming accident of his birth, which from his youth up put him on the alert to win by subtlety and craft what he could not claim by right.

2. There are two scenes in the drama of the stolen birthright.

(1) In the first scene we have the hungry hunter coming in from a hard day's chase upon the mountains, almost dying with exhaustion, and the crafty supplanter, quick to see his oppor-

tunity, and unscrupulous to press it home to the utmost. The fragrance of the pottage is a maddening incitement to the sensual appetite of Esau, and Esau's weakness is Jacob's opportunity. "And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" Can we not read the process of thought in Esau's mind? "The birthright, what good is it? It means no more money, or cattle, or land. It means only the barren honour of being priest, chaplain to the family. Jacob would make a better chaplain than I. What I want is pottage, not priesthood. Tangible food is better to a hungry man than the invisible possessions of honour." So he ate the pottage, wondering in his heart what Jacob could see in the birthright that was worth so much envious diplomacy, and how any man could stoop to so mean a trick to gain his ambitious ends. He felt something of the clumsy man's impotence in the presence of a subtler intellect, and something of the strong man's brusque contempt for intellectual motives he could not understand. He felt also the strong man's healthy scorn for meanness; he was outwitted, and, says the record, "he despised Jacob." So do we. Our sympathy goes inevitably with the wronged man, and if we censure the man who so flippantly bartered his birthright, it is clear we cannot admire the man who practically stole it.

Jacob was not only a traitor to his brother, he was also faithless towards his God. Had it not been distinctly whispered in his mother's ear that the elder of the brothers should serve the younger? Had not the realization of his loftiest ambition been pledged by One whose faithfulness had been the theme of repeated talks with Abraham, who had survived during the first eighteen years of his young life? He might have been well assured that what the God of Abraham had promised He was able also to perform; and would perform, without the aid of his own miserable schemes.

¶ At a meeting which was held in his honour in the auditorium at the Northfield Conference, August 13, 1910, Dr. Pierson delivered a remarkable address in which he told of God's leading, and he repeated the rules and promises that had been tested in his own experience. In response to the tributes from William R. Moody, Dr. Edward Young, and Rev. J. Stuart Holden he

merely said: "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from above," and he quoted the words of St. Paul, "It is not expedient for me to glory . . . but I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." He then mentioned four Scripture texts which had greatly influenced his life:—

1. "Psalm i. 1, 2—'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' This is the sole secret of prosperity and peace: Meditate in the Word of God and take delight in it. In more than fifty years of study I have only begun to understand it.

2. "Proverbs iii. 6—'In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.' Since the time when my father first gave me that text when I was a boy leaving home, it has been a principle in my life—never to make a plan without first seeking God's guidance, and never to achieve a success without giving Him the praise.

3. "Matthew vi. 33—'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.' This promise has been wonderfully fulfilled in my experience. Whenever I have taken a step on faith, and have sought to devote myself primarily to the advancement of God's interests, He has seen to it that I and my family have lacked nothing. I have made it a practice never to put a price on my services, and yet, even during the last twenty years, when I have received no stated salary, there has never been any lack. On the contrary, I have been able to give away more money than ever before.

4. "John vii. 17—'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' There is no need of scepticism or unbelief or doubt. Any man who is willing to do God's will can *know*, and the only way to *know* is to will to do. After more than fifty years of closest study, observation, and experience, I can testify that it pays to be a follower of God."

As he reached this climax, there was a note of assurance and of triumph in the voice that sent a thrill of conviction through his hearers. None who were present that morning will forget the power of his testimony to the faithfulness of God.[1]

(2) The second scene, of the dying Isaac, half-incredulous before the deceit of Jacob, the triple lie of the supplanter, "I am Esau thy firstborn," and then the exceeding bitter cry of Esau,

[1] D. L. Pierson, *Arthur T. Pierson*, 317.

"Bless me, even me also, O my father," when the blessing has gone from him beyond retrieval, is one of the most pathetic in the literature of the world. That exceeding bitter cry of Esau rings along the centuries, and still sets the heart vibrating with genuine pity, and that pity deepens into scorn and loathing of the mother and son who could conspire in such a plot. It is true that, having bought the birthright, the blessing had become Jacob's; but there was a manly way of claiming it, and a treacherous way of stealing it; and Jacob, always physically a coward, naturally preferred adroitness to straightforwardness. He first of all robbed Esau of his birthright. He now defrauds him of his blessing. The name "Supplanter" is therefore fairly earned by Jacob; and the character of a "supplanter" is to be regarded as representing, at this stage of his life at least, his character and disposition.

Few can contemplate Jacob's heartless and unprincipled conduct to his blind old father without feelings of disgust and indignation. For it reveals an abuse of age and infirmity; and again, a profligate persistence in falsehood, happily not common even among the least religious. To have said simply "I am Esau thy firstborn" might have been comparatively easy, but as the mistrustful old father put question after question, and test after test,—"How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?"—"Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son,"—and especially that plaintive appeal of conscious feebleness—"Art thou my very son Esau?"—still to meet each of these with the plausible excuse, or the steady affirmation, needed a cruelty and hardness of duplicity ordinarily to be found only among the most infamous of mankind.

If Jacob had been innocent and pure and wise, no one would have objected to God's preference of the younger over the elder brother, since that seems to have been the rule, rather than the exception, in His dealings with the elect family. It is Jacob's character, not his age, to which we object. He could not trust God to fulfil His own promise. Craftily, ungenerously, unrighteously, by driving hard bargains, by lying, by personation, he cozened his father and his brother into fulfilling the declared will of God. This was his offence, the offence for which we would have rejected him and think God should have rejected him too. Nevertheless, it is not necessary, with a view to cherishing a

Christian hatred of sin, to heap opprobrious epithets upon a fallible man, whom the choice of God has rendered venerable in the eyes of believers. In the present case, Jacob was rewarded for his faith in God's promises, and for his appreciation of them, when they seemed to bring no immediate advantage; not for the deceit by which he tried to secure them. In this he showed not his faith, but his want of faith. Deceit did not gain him the promises—they had been his before. It gained him only twenty years of exile from the promised land. It forced him to flee in terror from his father's roof; it filled his return with fears at the wrath of a justly offended brother. Deceit was made the instrument of his punishment; it met him in Laban's house, disappointing him of the wife for whom he had served, defrauding him ten times, as he complained, of the wages for which he had bargained; and it well-nigh brought his grey hairs to the grave in sorrow for the supposed death of a living son. The Scripture narrative itself, then, teaches us that God's approbation was not given to the means which Jacob used to gain the promises, but only to this, that he really did value the promises of God, little fruit in this life though they seemed to bring—that he set his affections on them, and earnestly strove to obtain them.

Jacob indeed was mean, crafty, timid; and therefore he does not seem entirely fit to be the heir of the Covenant. But he gained nothing by his sins except a discipline of misery and shame which lasted nearly his whole life long, and by which he was at last purged from his sins. But with his faults and sins there were blended strange virtues—the capacity to sacrifice present gratification to future good, to prefer the spiritual to the sensuous; and, in fine, that faith which at once fitted and enabled him to see visions and to hear voices from Heaven, to learn what the will of God was and to conform himself to it. He had a forecast, a shrewdness, a persevering wisdom, an organizing power, that pointed him out as the statesman. And so he was selected, not because in every respect his disposition was the best, but because he was the best instrument to execute the purpose which God had in view.

¶ It is true that Jacob's behaviour to his brother and father does not even suggest any realization of Divine guidance, any sense of dependence on God. We might suppose that Jacob was

an ungodly man, determined to wrest for himself that of which he thought he had been cruelly deprived by nature. It is Bethel that reveals Jacob's piety. Dreams are, more often than not, indications of character; and that which Jacob saw on the first night after leaving home is no uncertain sign of what his mind had been busy with during the lonely walk towards Syria. As Dr. Davidson says: "God used the thoughts which had been working all day in his mind to attach His revelation to. This is the way in which revelation came, and perhaps still comes. It was made to fit into the circumstances and feelings of the man to whom it came."[1]

3. A dark cloud rested upon Jacob's after life to its close, when the joy of God's blessing seems again to have been fully restored. A solemn penitential colouring seems to pervade this patriarch's history; and the recorded prayers of Jacob, interspersed through the narrative, attest the faithful, praying, holy character of the man, against which his sins stand out in the most marked contrast. Jacob's first notion was like the notion of the heathen in all times, "My God has a special favour for me, therefore I may do what I like. He will prosper me in doing wrong; He will help me to cheat my father." But God showed him that that was just what He would not do for him. He would help and protect him; but only while he was doing right. God would not alter His moral laws for him or any man. God would be just and righteous; and Jacob must be so likewise, till he learnt to trust not merely in a God who happened to have a special favour for him, but in the righteous God who loves justice, and wishes to make men righteous even as He is righteous, and will make them righteous, if they trust in Him.

¶ Evil consists in living for *self*—that is to say, for one's own vanity, pride, sensuality, or even health. Righteousness consists in willingly accepting one's lot, in submitting to and espousing the destiny assigned to us, in willing what God commands, in renouncing what He forbids us, in consenting to what He takes from us or refuses us.[2]

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *Personality and Power*, 51.
[2] *Amiel's Journal* (trans. by Mrs. Humphry Ward).

II.

Bethel.

And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.—Gen. xxviii. 16.

1. Driven from his home by the threats of Esau, by the fears of Rebekah, by the commands of Isaac, Jacob sets forth on the long and dangerous journey from Beersheba to Haran. Perhaps we are scarcely able to judge of the sorrowful feelings which this banishment would beget in his soul. Here we go from one Christian home to another. If we leave the parental roof we may hope still to sojourn where there is an altar to the Most High God, and where we can still unite with worshippers who fear His Name. Not so in Jacob's case. The family of which he was a member was the only household in the land that worshipped God; or if there were some few others probably they were unknown to one another, and, as far as Jacob's knowledge would go, he was fully assured that all the way from the place where he left his father until he arrived at Padan-aram he would not meet with a single person who feared the God of heaven. He was passing from one oasis to another across a burning sand. So in leaving his father's house there may have been this troublous thought rising in his mind, that he was also leaving his father's God; that now his prayers would scarcely be heard; that he should be an alien from Jehovah's land, and cut off from the congregation of the blessed.

¶ Home is the first and most important school of character. It is there that every human being receives his best moral training or his worst; for it is there that he imbibes those principles of conduct which endure through manhood, and cease only with life. It is a common saying that "Manners make the man"; and there is a second, "Mind makes the man"; but truer than either is a third, that "Home makes the man," for the home-training includes not only manners and mind, but character. It is mainly in the home that the heart is opened, the habits are formed, the intellect is awakened, and character moulded for good or for evil.[1]

[1] S. Smiles, *Character*, 31.

2. As Jacob journeyed northwards, he came, on the second or third evening of his flight, to the hills of Bethel. As the sun was sinking he found himself toiling up the rough path which Abraham may have described to him as looking like a great staircase of rock and crag reaching from earth to sky. Slabs of rock, piled one upon another, form the whole hillside; and to Jacob's eye, accustomed to the rolling pastures of Beersheba, they would appear almost like a structure built for superhuman uses, well founded in the valley below, and intended to reach to unknown heights. Overtaken by darkness on this rugged path, he readily finds as soft a bed and as good shelter as his shepherd habits require, and with his head on a stone and a corner of his dress thrown over his face to preserve him from the moon, he is soon fast asleep. But in his dreams the massive staircase is still before his eyes, and it is no longer himself that is toiling up it as it leads to an unexplored hilltop above him, but the angels of God are ascending and descending upon it, and at its top is Jehovah Himself.

Jacob had probably lain down without any thought of God. Perhaps he thought—like Jonah nearly a thousand years later—that he had fled from the presence of the Lord. For he was a fugitive, and he knew it. His old blind father whom he had deceived might not know it. Rebekah had sown the seeds of fear in Isaac's mind concerning the possibility of Jacob's contracting a heathen marriage, the seeds had germinated, and Isaac had dismissed him to go and seek a wife among his mother's kinsfolk, and had sent him away with a reiterated blessing. But Jacob knew, and Rebekah knew, that he was going because he was compelled to go, and because the home was no longer wide enough for the two brothers. He did not know, he did not realize, that the God of Abraham to whom his mother prayed was there and would be everywhere, and in his dream it became clear to him.

¶ "As often as you can in the course of the day, recall your spirit into the presence of God," writes St. Francis of Sales in his meditations on the Devout Life. In the noise and confusion of the visible, one needs constantly to take refuge in the invisible. We are always in the presence of God; to find that presence we do not need to seek the silence of the desert or the monastery; we need only to remember that we are in His presence, and to

recall our spirits to the consciousness that wherever we are, there is God also. To give his deep counsel greater definiteness, the great Bishop of Geneva adds these striking words: "Remember, then, to make occasional retreat into the solitudes of your heart, whilst outwardly engaged in business or conversation. This mental solitude cannot be prevented by the multitude of those who are about you, for they are not about your heart, but about your body; so your heart may remain above, in the presence of God alone."[1]

3. The dream is vividly described. The rocky hilltop, the stony slabs over which he has dragged his feet, become a glorified stairway reaching from earth to heaven. Celestial messengers are on it, coming and returning, and the voice to which Abraham was accustomed to listen in the night-time was speaking to him. It was one of the great moments in the history of this strange man, a dream whose memory and influence never left him, which you may be sure he told to his children, and especially to Joseph. We can imagine how great must have been his astonishment when the revelation of God came to him in a pagan sanctuary; when, far away from the sacred places of Beersheba, among the lonely desert hills of Ephraim, the visionary ladder connected heaven with this temple of the sun, and claimed it to be a sacred shrine of God.

Wonderful as was the sight, almost more wonderful were the words heard by Jacob: "I am the Lord God of Abraham." "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." "I am with thee, and will keep with thee in all places whither thou goest." He was shown the past and the future, the things of eternity and those of time, all in one. He saw earth and heaven in one. He heard the bygone generations of his race, himself, and all the distant families of men that were yet to come, linked in one.

We may regard Jacob's first words on awaking as disclosing to us the true nature of his dream. It was a revelation of God: "Surely the Lord is in this place." But it was a revelation that startled him into a new consciousness—"Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." It was the beginning of a new life. Fear followed on surprise. That passion was inherent in

[1] H. W. Mabie, *The Life of the Spirit*, 138.

Jacob's character, and it was that which spoilt the man in his early time. It made him underhand, desirous to soften every one with presents; it made his life often wretched in Canaan, and his faith of such slow growth. But Jacob had the stuff of a man in him. He had power of will over his fear; he could subdue it for the sake of success; it never prevented him from following up his point, and by and by he learnt how to lift fear into veneration of God.

¶ Jacob has heard no word of upbraiding or threatening. Yet he feels how awful it is to be near God, how dreadful to have a heavenly searchlight flashed into his soul. He is penetrated with holy fear, abashed by the pure splendour of the Divine. That does not mean that he wishes for a moment to escape from God. He would not for a world have spent this night anywhere but just where he has spent it; and he would not for a ransom be anywhere now but just where he is. This spot will always be in his memory the dearest on earth, this night better than a thousand. But while he rejoices he trembles. No sinful man can be in the presence of God without fear. That sense of awe—we may feel it alone on a bare moorland under the stars, or in a great temple among a multitude of worshippers, or in an upper room where two or three friends are gathered together. But, when it comes to us, there is no mistaking it, for that reverential feeling is different from any other emotion that ever visits the human heart.[1]

4. Jacob responded to this marvellous vision. He was overawed and afraid; but his nature was awakened by the vision, and it replied to God's drawing of him. He vowed a vow that Jehovah should be his God. He made a resolution. He gathered himself up, and resolutely determined. He did not, as we often do, when melted or awed by the vision of God in Christ, allow the effect to wear off, doing nothing. He came to a decision. Religion needs this both at the beginning and all through. No man ever found himself, by accident or good fortune, in the kingdom of heaven. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." But he did more. He vowed a vow; and he also set up a stone. He made the inner resolution; and, having taken it, he also set to it this strange outward seal. He left there, for all men to see, a monument of his having met with God.

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 45.

But even here a worldly, selfish element seems to mingle with his pious devotion. His solemn vow of allegiance to the God of his fathers is strangely conditioned on his future prosperity. Still, we are not disposed to question the sincerity of his vow, and his determination, from that memorable experience at Bethel, to acknowledge and serve the God of Abraham and Isaac. He stood now on the threshold of a "new departure." He was to begin now a new and untried life. His life thus far had been a strange and a mixed life. The future was full of anxiety. God had just called him to a wonderful experience. And under all these circumstances, after a night of wondrous vision, he rises up early in the morning and sets up a pillar as a memorial, and records a solemn vow, binding him to fidelity and service "to the Lord God of Abraham his father." It was a fitting service, a right start in his new course.

¶ It was at the beginning of these somewhat reckless years that I came to the great decision of my life. I remember it well. Our Sunday-school class had been held in the vestry as usual. The lesson was finished, and we had marched back into the chapel to sing, answer questions, and to listen to a short address. I was sitting at the head of the seat, and can even now see Mr. Meikle taking from his breast-pocket a copy of the *United Presbyterian Record*, and hear him say that he was going to read an interesting letter to us from a missionary in Fiji. The letter was read. It spoke of cannibalism, and of the power of the Gospel; and at the close of the reading, looking over his spectacles, and with wet eyes, he said, "I wonder if there is a boy here this afternoon who will yet become a missionary, and by and by bring the Gospel to cannibals?" And the response of my heart was, "Yes, God helping me, and I will." So impressed was I that I spoke to no one, but went right away towards home. The impression became greater the further I went, until I got to the bridge over the Aray above the mill and near to the Black Bull. There I went over the wall attached to the bridge, and kneeling down prayed God to accept of me, and to make me a missionary to the heathen.[1]

5. Jacob's vision bore its fruits. For twenty years it lay dormant; it was revived at Peniel; it rose and fell, and rose and fell again during his long life in Canaan; but it broke out, undecayed, into full radiance in Egypt, where, rejoicing in the

[1] *James Chalmers: Autobiography and Letters* (by R. Lovett), 23.

vast growth of his house, he looked forward with faith, self wholly forgotten in the vision, through the mist of death and of the future, to prophesy the glory of his nation in the promised land. It took him seventy years to realize the full meaning of this vision on the hill, but he did realize it at last; not only that part which belonged to earth, but also that which belonged to himself and God. It is beautiful to hear him recall it as he did with undiminished memory. "And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, and said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession." See how the memory of the first revelation pervades his dying utterance as with a long-preserved perfume; how vividly we recognize in the words that the vision on the hill had ruled and guided his whole life!

¶ There is little fear that God will hide Himself longer than is necessary from a soul that seeks to walk consciously in the light of His Presence. But the visible too often crowds out the invisible. Too often we forget that God is with us; then we are weak in temptation, because relying on our own strength instead of looking to Him for help. And yet we reach out with a real heart-hunger for that Infinite Love. Perhaps the last waking thought at night is the sweet peace of resting on the Divine Heart, without a shadow of care—like the good soldier of Christ who lately fell asleep murmuring "Holy, Holy, Holy." Perhaps our first waking thought may be the joy of being in the service of the Master of the World. But what of the hours when we are immersed in the work or pleasure of the Day, do we always walk with God joyously and bravely? Do we not often forget His very existence, and act or speak or think as though we had no Heavenly Father, no Master to lean on and to obey? Even though the great Vision may be only seen indistinctly, still it has wonderful power to help and strengthen a soul that is bent on climbing, a soul that longs to reflect the beauty of holiness, which makes the Face of the King so wondrously attractive.[1]

¶ Up here the air was fresh and invigorating. I followed the stream to its secret fastness, where it brimmed a tiny pool, all cushioned round by exquisite soft water-mosses, out of which pricked the strong spikes of the golden hill-asphodel, the loveliest of mountain-loving flowers. There I ate and drank, and like the

[1] Dora Farncomb, *The Vision of His Face*, 4.

elders in the mount, I saw God. Yes, I saw Him, felt Him, rested under His great hand, breathed His patient influence. It all came on me in a moment, and in a moment it was gone, before the drop that trembled at the pool edge could globe itself and drip upon the stones below. I was in His presence, a spirit so old, and wise, and great, that I knew for an instant how foolish and childish it is to wonder, or to grieve, or to complain, because His laws are so august and so tremendous that one must rejoice with all one's frail heart that one is ruled by them; whose tenderness is so perfect and all-embracing that there is no room to doubt or fret; who, if He seems to be severe or indifferent, is so only because He has waited so long and has so long to wait; who has suffered and endured and grieved so much that pain and sorrow is no more to Him than the fleeting shadow of a bird, flying over a field of golden wheat; and whose design is so vast, so incredibly joyful, so speechlessly serene, that the doubts and griefs and sorrows of all the men and women that have ever lived are but as the trivial ripple on a mighty ocean of peace. That was the vision; and there came on me such a sense of hope and eager expectation and far-reaching love that I felt utterly swallowed up and enfolded in it, as a drop of wandering water that sinks into the bosom of the sleeping lake.[1]

III.

Padan-aram.

1. Forth then Jacob went with hope and courage, and he was divinely guided to his eastern kinsmen. In return for the hand of the fair Rachel whom he loved, he offered Laban seven years of service; but by a craft that matched and avenged his own he was defrauded of his bride. The constant Jacob, however, shrank not from other seven years of service for the woman that he loved. But while her sister bore him children, Rachel herself remained barren, and, Sarah-like, sought children through her maid, and by other wrongful means. At length after years of waiting God gave the barren Rachel a son, even Joseph. Thus by his wives and their maids, Jacob had eleven sons and one daughter.

Then Jacob longed to go back to his own country, but his discipline was not yet complete. He must wait and serve yet

[1] A. C. Benson, *Thy Rod and Thy Staff*, 203.

more. At the entreaty of Laban, who marked the prosperity which Jacob had brought him, he remained, claiming a wage which seemed but trifling. But the wily Jacob outwitted the wily Aramean, and by craft and skill became very rich and prosperous.

¶ If there be a moral end in human life, one purpose served by trial is to produce and strengthen and purify character. Robert Browning declared that there was nothing worth study but the incidents in the development of a soul. Perhaps that is why he, for one, found it easy to provide a place in his view of the world for pain and evil. The struggle was necessary for the high end of character, and was justified by the end. Whatever will further development and growth is sufficiently explained by its practical value. Growth is seen to be a much bigger thing than merely getting rid of weaknesses and lopping off excrescences. It is a process by which the tissue and fibre of character are built up and hardened and strengthened. If the world is to man an arena of moral training, and if life is a great opportunity for becoming, then we have already one simple need for some of the evils of life as mere discipline. It is not a complete explanation of tribulation of all sorts, but it is a partial explanation, and, so far as it goes, we should understand it and accept it. It is not sufficient in itself to explain the function of suffering in human life, but it is undoubtedly a place where we do see some light.[1]

2. Jacob had served Laban seven years for Leah and seven for Rachel. It is possible that when the fourteen years had run out, he agreed to serve his father-in-law for another term of seven years. But by the end of the sixth year his growing wealth, and the craft by which he had won that wealth, had offended his Syrian kinsmen. The sons of Laban charged him with having enriched himself at their expense, and Laban himself wore a boding look. Then he was divinely warned to return to the promised land. "The Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee."

In point of fact, Jacob was becoming too contented in that strange land. Like Ulysses and his crew, he was in danger of forgetting the land of his birth, the tents of his father, and the promises of which he was the heir. He was fast losing the pilgrim spirit, and settling into a citizen of that far country. His

[1] Hugh Black, *Comfort*, 55.

mean and crafty arts to increase his wealth were honeycombing his spirit, and eating out his nobler nature, prostituting it to the meanest ends. His wives, infected with the idolatry of their father's house, were in danger of corrupting the minds of his children; and how then would fare the holy seed, destined to give the world the messages of God? It was evident that his nest must be broken up in Haran; that he must be driven back into the pilgrim-life—to become a stranger and a sojourner, as his fathers were. And this was another step nearer the moment when he became Israel, a prince with God.

¶ Only by degrees do we escape from that "body of death" which would rob us of freedom and make us simply a limb of the past, without character or individuality. Slowly, by the discipline of experience, and still more by the power of that love on which our relationship with God and others is based, the self gets purged. We are led, on the one hand, to realize the nearness of the spiritual kingdom and the reality of God's presence; and on the other, the varied claims of kinsfolk and friends. Faith pulls us out in one direction and love in another; and so the character, enlarged and deepened, not only affects something here, but is bound to affect something in the world to come. And if we ask what practice it is that keeps all these relationships open, the answer is clear. Jacob came out as he did in the end, because he was pre-eminently a man of prayer. Prayer with him was struggle, a definite struggle to bring his own will into submission to God's and to know God's mind.[1]

3. Laban started in pursuit; but God intervened to save Jacob from his revenge, and Laban did him no hurt. He was, however, indignant at the theft of his images, which he sought for in vain, being outwitted by the daughter whom years before he had defrauded of her rightful husband. Thus Laban was foiled at all points. Jacob remonstrated with Laban for his unjust requital of all his faithful service, overruled, however, and requited by the gracious God of his fathers. Touched by his remonstrance, Laban proposed a covenant of friendship; and there, between the two, a solemn covenant was made in Gilead, which was henceforth to be the boundary between the Israelites and the Arameans. Then Laban returned to his own land, and Jacob to his.

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *Personality and Power*, 55.

¶ What a downcome it was from the covenant-heights of Bethel to the cattle-troughs of Haran! What a cruel fall from the company of ascending and descending angels into the clutches of a finished rogue like Laban! Jacob had been all but carried up of angels from Bethel and taken into an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled; but, instead of that, he is taken down to Padan-aram, where he is cheated out of his wages, and cheated out of his wife, and cheated, and cheated, and cheated again, ten times cheated, and that too by his own mother's brother, till cheating came out of Jacob's nostrils, and stank in his eyes, and became hateful as hell to Jacob's heart. Jacob had never seen or heard the like of it in his country. It shocked terribly and irrecoverably Jacob's inborn sense of right and wrong; it almost shook down Jacob's whole faith in the God of Bethel. It was Jacob's salvation that he fell into the hands of that cruel land-shark, his uncle Laban. Jacob's salvation is somewhat nearer now than when he believed at Bethel; but, all the same, what is bred in the bone is not got clean rid of in a day. It were laughable to a degree, if it were not so sad, to see Jacob, after all his smart, still peeling the stakes of poplar, and chestnut, and hazel where the cattle came to drink, till it came about that all the feebler births in the cattle-pens were Laban's and all the stronger were Jacob's; till Laban had to give it up and to confess himself completely outwitted; and till he piously and affectionately proposed a covenant at Mizpah, saying, "This pillar be witness that I will not pass over it to harm thee, nor thou to harm me."[1]

4. Jacob had passed through twenty years of exile. That was a great many years. It ought to have worn off a great deal, and buried a great deal. But when he set his face to go back again to his father's land, almost the very first experience that he had was the shadow of a great fear, lying right across his path. It was the shadow of that brother Esau. "And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight." This is the man that had stolen the birthright, and made himself the chief. He is returning to his country; and his very

[1] A. Whyte.

first act is to assume the manners of a servant, and to bow down, recognizing the chieftainship of his brother. Such transformation fear makes.[1]

¶ We are not always in a state of strong emotion, and when we are calm we can use our memories and gradually change the bias of our fear, as we do our tastes. Take your fear as a safeguard. It is like quickness of hearing. It may make consequences passionately present to you. Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision.[2]

¶ Fear is a very strange and terrible part of our human inheritance. But the *raison d'être* of it is, I suppose, the instinct to live. If it were not for fear, the fear of death, how often should we tend to end our miseries together, and how little effort should we make in the face of danger to extricate ourselves. Fear, at a crisis, evokes the swiftest kind of inventiveness, and it is, I suppose, the quality which more than any other keeps us alive.[3]

IV.

Peniel.

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.—Gen. xxxii. 24.

1. "Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." On his leaving the Holy Land he had a vision of angels; and with a corresponding glad welcome did the angels greet him on returning, at the very threshold of the same. "And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host." It is indeed as if God had "given his angels charge over him, to keep him in all his ways," and had bidden them as it were to "encamp round about" him. Great were the difficulties that confronted him now that he was in the heaven-directed path. There was in Jacob's past a dark memory. There was an ancient sin, a family quarrel, a feud that had never been healed, a sin of twenty years' standing that had never been dealt with, an old score that had never been settled. And "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed." He then engaged in earnest prayer for deliverance, and sent his family and herds across the ford to encamp for the night; and Jacob was left alone.

[1] H. W. Beecher, *Sermons*, 110. [2] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*.
[3] A. C. Benson, *Thy Rod and Thy Staff*, 37.

But not to sleep. Twenty years ago he could sleep on the hillside, but not now; he is older, his cares are many, his danger is great. Whilst others sleep, he paces beside the stream, wrapped in thought and gloom. No doubt, as he listens to the brawling Jabbok wrestling its way through the gully on to the river, and the night winds moaning round about him, with the fear of his brother still nearer to him than the winds, surrounding his soul with its chill, Jacob was inclined to pray to God for comfort: "O God! comfort me. O God! help me. O God! be good to me. O my Father! kiss me, and put thy arms round about me." And God did, but not to kiss him, at least, not at first—not to kiss him, but to crush him, to take the Jacob in him, and simply pulverize it once for all.

2. Behold the supplanter by Jabbok's ford! It is an hour in which everything that he holds dear—the safety of his family, the lives of his dependants, the fruit of twenty years of toil—is at stake. Suddenly, as the sand-cloud of the desert rises up in the path of the caravan, there is lifted up before Jacob the wrathful cloud of four hundred armed men; and in the midst of this cloud, and glaring out upon him from its blackness, the face of his wronged brother Esau. What shall be the result? Shall the angry cloud tear a path of ruin through his possessions? Shall a cruel death sweep from before his very eyes the forms of his loved ones? The hour is critical, and the smart and successful man trembles before it. No sooner is he alone in the presence of his danger than the void about him grows tremulous, palpitating with life, and he himself is wrestling with that which to a lighter hour had been vacancy and nothingness.[1]

There, under the still night-sky, these two wrestle in dreadful embrace, the stranger to subdue Jacob, Jacob to shake off the stranger and save his life. Presently the dawn breaks, and the stranger, determined to prevail, by one touch lames the weary man so that he can contend no more. His end is gained. He can depart then, he does not want to kill Jacob but to conquer him, and that is done.

But, by that conquering touch, or perhaps by the voice now heard for the first time, "Let me go, for the day breaketh,"

[1] S. S. Mitchell, *The Staff Method*, 137.

Jacob's eyes are opened; he sees that he has wrestled not with man but with God, and that God has subdued him; then quick as thought, in a triumph of faith, he resolves that he in turn will prevail with Him. He can resist no more, he is past that; he is in pain, his thigh is out of joint, the sweat beads his pale wild face, he cannot stand. But he can cling—he can cling; so in an agony of determination he flings his arms round the Holy One, and clasps Him close and cries, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Nor did he; Jacob conquered now: "He blessed him there."

¶ Much of *Modern Painters* consists of brilliant active thoughts, born of the intellect rather than of the heart, which came lightly and fancifully, and were swiftly and gracefully set down. But in *Fors* it is as though one saw some awful spiritual combat proceeding, like the wrestling of Jacob by night with the angel on Penuel, whose form he could not see and whose nature he could not guess, whether he meant to test his strength, or to overcome him and leave him maimed. And just as the angel, though he was an angel of light, made the sinew of the halting thigh shrink at his fiery touch, so Ruskin, too, emerged from the conflict a shattered man; and to myself, I will frankly confess, it is just this heart-breaking conflict, this appalling struggle with mighty thoughts and dreadful fears, that made at once the tragedy and the glory of Ruskin's life, because it broke his pride and humbled his complacency, and crowned him with the hero's crown. For let me say once and for all, that under all his irony and humour, under his unbalanced vehemence and his no less unbalanced sorrow, Ruskin's work, if not severely logical, was neither eccentric nor irresponsible. Its soundness, its ultimate sanity, was confirmed and not depreciated by subsequent events.[1]

3. Jacob now triumphant must be transformed, and so the angel asks him, "What is thy name? And he said, Jacob." He had to confess it. It was the last drop in his cup of humbling. Supplanter, deceiver, sinner—is that thy name? Crafty, cunning, defeated Jacob—is that thy name? Thanks be to God, thy name shall be no more called Jacob, thou shalt have another name. Thou shalt rise above thine old self, thou shalt be called *Israel, a prince with God.* "For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

[1] A. C. Benson, *Ruskin: A Study in Personality*, 134.

But God was not now the same to Jacob as twenty years before. This was a more awful, closer, more intense communion; it was not the inexperienced youth realizing another world than that of the senses; it was the deeper passion and power of manhood in struggle with the invisible. And mark how much Jacob's character had gained: mark the unfailing perseverance, the abiding determination which would not let go his purpose, but held on to it for hour after hour till he won. That is what made him worthy to be the founder of that people whose intense clinging to life in history and indomitable force have kept them as a power in the world even to the present day. Scattered as they are, the Jews have never perished. The ancient Greek is no more, the ancient Roman has died, but the Jew is living still. Israel is still a people.

4. Jacob was satisfied that he had seen God face to face; "and Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for," he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." This confirms the opinion that the person with whom Jacob wrestled was none other than a Divine being. Jacob knew too much about God to mistake any created being for Him. He does not say that he has seen an angel, but he has seen God face to face, and his life was preserved.

This struggle had, therefore, immense significance for the history of Jacob. It is, in fact, a concrete representation of the attitude he had maintained towards God throughout his previous history; and it constitutes the turning-point at which he assumes a new and satisfactory attitude. Year after year Jacob had still retained confidence in himself; he had never been thoroughly humbled, but had always felt himself able to regain the land he had lost by his sin. And in this struggle he shows this same determination and self-confidence. He wrestles on indomitably. As Kurtz says: "All along Jacob's life had been the struggle of a clever and strong, a pertinacious and enduring, a self-confident and self-sufficient person, who was sure of the result only when he helped himself—a contest with God, who wished to break his strength and wisdom, in order to bestow upon him real strength in Divine weakness, and real wisdom in Divine folly." All this self-confidence culminates now, and in one final and sensible

struggle, his Jacob-nature, his natural propensity to wrest from the most unwilling opponent what he desires and win what he aims at, does its very utmost and does it in vain. The Lord who was the author, at Bethel, was now the finisher, of the patriarch's faith.

¶ In this scene of early morning prayer we have vividly placed before us struggling humanity in wretched helplessness and Divine power manifesting itself so as to make man's extremity God's opportunity. It would be hard to imagine a case more in need of Divine help than is the case of Jacob. The Lord had promised to be with him, and now he pleads the fulfilment of that promise. He feels the need of a greater blessing. There is nothing that so unnerves a man in the presence of danger as a guilty conscience. This causes him to fear where there is no danger, and magnifies everything that appears to be harmful. Jacob was, no doubt, in this state of mind; and although he had the promise of Divine protection, his own consciousness of guilt robbed that promise of comforting power.[1]

5. Years afterwards, when Jacob was on his death-bed, we are told that Joseph brought his two sons to receive the blessing of their grandfather: and the words in which he gave it, "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads," seem to point to some definite personal experience in the old man's memory, which can hardly be other than this story of Peniel. And so we may look on this episode as the central crisis in Jacob's life: the moment of awakening, of conversion, of permanent change, when a higher life was grasped and begun, when the meannesses and cunning of selfishness and over-reaching disappeared, and a worthier, nobler life began because he had seen God face to face.

¶ God calls us that we may know Christ, in order that we may accept His covenant, and having accepted it, may be righteous, and being righteous, that He may be able to show us His presence. We are not to rest contented with knowing Christ, nor with being righteous, but, going on, to desire to see the presence of God, and with continuous prayer to supplicate of God that He may show it us daily less veiled and more clearly, until that in the life eternal we may see Him face to face, even as He is. This ought to be our aim; in this we ought evermore to occupy ourselves.[2]

[1] L. L. Nash, *Early Morning Scenes in the Bible*, 76. [2] Juan de Valdes.

We know not when, we know not where,
We know not what that world will be;
But this we know: it will be fair
To see.

With heart athirst and thirsty face
We know and know not what shall be:
Christ Jesus bring us of His grace
To see.

Christ Jesus bring us of His grace,
Beyond all prayers our hope can pray,
One day to see Him face to face,
One day.[1]

[1] Christina G. Rossetti.

JACOB.

II.

ISRAEL THE PRINCE OF GOD.

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Israel the Prince of God.

Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed.—Gen. xxxii. 28.

With the change of Jacob's name to Israel, the tone of the narratives changes. Esau is no longer the rude natural man, the easy victim of his brother's cunning, but a noble and princely character, whose bearing is evidently meant to inspire admiration. Jacob, too, is presented in a more favourable light: if he is still shrewd and calculating, and not perfectly truthful, he does not sink to the knavery of his earlier dealings with Esau and Laban, but exhibits the typical virtues of the patriarchal ideal.

I.

The Meeting with Esau.

The midnight wrestle by the brook Jabbok made an epoch in Jacob's life. It was the moment in which he stepped up to a new level in his experience—the level of Israel the Prince. But, let us remember, it is one thing to step up to a level like that; it is quite another to keep it. Jacob's after-life was strong in comparison with the infirmities of the years before, and pure in comparison with the sins that had stained his earlier years, but it was not without flaw and foible.

As the morning broke, "Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men." Each moment brought him nearer. Jacob, still timid, rearranged the company that was with him, placing his secondary wives and their children in front, next to them Leah with her children, last of all his most dearly beloved Rachel and Joseph. Then he himself

went on before them all, and, as his brother approached, "bowed himself to the ground seven times," an act of extreme humility. Jacob had the birthright and was the superior according to the customs of that age. But he "bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother." Esau, at the sight, forgot his wrongs, if he had hitherto cherished a remembrance of them, and running forward to meet Jacob, "embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept." The past was forgotten, or at any rate forgiven. The brothers were at one again.

Esau then offered to escort his brother to his own country of Seir, or else to leave with him a number of his spearmen as protectors; but Jacob declined both offers as unnecessary, and indeed, as inconvenient, since it would hurry his cattle and his children too much if they had to move as fast as Esau's soldiers. With characteristic reticence, he did not tell his brother whither he was bent on going, but spoke as if he was about to visit him in Seir shortly. His attitude towards Esau was extremely politic, and not very heroic.

And so the dreaded meeting with Esau has passed; the two brothers retain their characters throughout the interview—the generosity of the one, and the caution of the other. And for the last time Esau retires to make room for Jacob; he leaves to him the land of his inheritance, and disappears on his way to the wild mountains of Seir. Throughout the whole course of the interview that which we most wonder at and admire is the generosity of Esau.

¶ It has been said that the Celt never forgives; now the injunction to forgive seventy times seven was to Signor the supreme commandment. He told me that it had once happened to him to be very angry with some one person, and to feel so for some time; and then, thinking over it one day, he had come to see that it would be better to put away all the angry feelings, and to try to believe that circumstances had been too strong; and with that he made a great effort to conquer himself, and after doing so he felt a strange influence like something celestial passing over him, as if a higher power had laid his hand upon his head. It was something he had never known before or since—a glimpse of the Divine.[1]

[1] M. S. Watts, *George Frederick Watts*, ii. 280.

II.

The Settlement at Shechem.

1. After a pleasant halt among the pastures of Succoth, Jacob, we are told, crossed the Jordan and came to that green valley of Shechem which is set amongst the rough highlands of Ephraim, like an emerald in a circlet of brass. Here, in the midst of its gushing springs and verdant pastures, the patriarch purchased a plot of ground; here he dug his celebrated well; and here, for the first time upon the sacred soil of Canaan, he erected an altar, writing upon it the significant superscription, El-Elohe-Israel—God, the God of Israel. Heretofore he had spoken of Jehovah as the God of *Abraham*, or the Fear of *Isaac*; now, for the first time, he ventures to call God *his* God; and calls him, not the God of *Jacob* (his old name), but the God of *Israel*, his new name, the name which God Himself had just given him. It is as a new man, a changed and bettered man, that he ventures to think of God, not as far off, but near; not as the God of his good father and grandfather, but as his own God, whom he is bound to recognize and serve in all he does, and to whom he is bent on devoting his new life.

After all that had happened to Jacob, we should have expected him to make for Bethel as rapidly as his unwieldy company could be moved forward. But the pastures that had charmed the eye of his grandfather captivated Jacob as well. He bought land at Shechem, and appeared willing to settle there. The vows which he had uttered with such fervour when his future was precarious are apparently quite forgotten, or more probably neglected, now that danger seems past.

2. Out of this condition Jacob was roughly awakened. Sinning by unfaithfulness and softness towards his family, he was, according to the usual law, punished by family disaster of the most painful kind. Shechem dishonoured Jacob's daughter. But he loved her, and offered to pay for her any bridal price that might be imposed. The bargain was struck. Yet Simeon and Levi slew him, to avenge the purity of the family stained by union with an alien. Jacob himself was thoroughly indignant; the

outrage he never could forget; but he was politic, and he did not interfere; he raised no difficulty; and when he came to speak of it he said to Simeon and Levi: "Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." This rebuke sounds of the mildest; but none the less, as we happen to know in this case, Jacob felt much more than he cared to say. He never forgot their treachery and bloodthirstiness, and the pain it gave him. As he blessed his sons from his dying bed, this long-past deed turned the blessing of the two foremost actors in it into a curse.

3. The extermination of the men of Shechem, followed by the spoliation of all they possessed, made it imperative that Jacob should resume his wanderings. Afraid to stir a step alone, he asks counsel of the God who is now *his* God; and God bids him move southward on Bethel, nearer therefore to Hebron, where Isaac had dwelt. And at Bethel he is to make an altar to the God who had appeared to him when he fled from the face of Esau his brother; in other words, he is reminded of the vow he left at Bethel nearly thirty years ago, and is invited to fulfil it. The summons to go back to Bethel was equivalent to an invitation to return to that fervour, that devotion, and those holy vows which had made that bare mountain-pass the very house of God and the gate of heaven. "Come back; and be as near to Me as you were when you first set up that stone, and anointed it with oil." It met with an instant response: "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel."

For several years after his settlement at Shechem, held back it may be through the shame of his own unworthiness, or perhaps not yet fully awakened to the pernicious influence of idolatry, Jacob seems to have regarded the semi-heathen practices of his domestics with an over-easy toleration. But his leaving Shechem was a deed of repentance united with cleansing and putting away of the strange gods. God the Almighty commanded them to leave, and to cleanse, and the power of God protected them as

they removed from the vengeance of the inhabitants round about. This great purification and renunciation is commanded in order that the covenant made with Jacob at Bethel thirty years before may not only be confirmed with him at the same spot, but be extended to his entire household. In Jacob's story Israel is taught through its ancestor Jacob that it should have laid aside the service of every other god the moment it trod the sacred soil of Canaan.

III.

The Return to Bethel.

1. When, having left his idols behind, Jacob had got back to Bethel, and had built again the altar of renewed consecration, we are told significantly that "God appeared unto him again, and blessed him." It was a great blessing, indeed, that God vouchsafed to Jacob. "God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob; thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name." The angel had said as much as this at Peniel; and, for a brief moment, Jacob had shone in the transfiguring gleam of royalty. But the gleam was transient enough, like that which sometimes breaks for a moment far out upon a stormy sea, and is instantly veiled again. But there had been wrought on him a deep spiritual change since then; and his experience had been brought into more constant conformity with the level of Israel, the Prince—which was now re-affirmed as his perpetual designation. And forthwith he was plunged into a fiery furnace of trial, which made both name and character permanent.

But while this inward change, or the deepened and confirmed sense of that change, is the chief blessing of this new covenant at Bethel, the outward inheritance of the Prince with God is not forgotten. The goodly land, promised to Abraham and to Isaac, is now "given" to Jacob, and to his seed after him. God Almighty, who bids him "be fruitful and multiply," promises that a multitude of nations shall spring from him, and that kings shall call him father. There is a blessing for his children in the new covenant, as well as for him, down to his remotest posterity.

2. One would say now that his happiness was secured. God has come close to him, has blest him, and a happy life awaits him. It is just the contrary; which seems strange enough to those who do not realize that it is not happiness, but perfection, that God wishes for us—to those who do not know that it is in adversity and not in prosperity that the sons of God are moulded for their work and for the life to come. From the moment of the revelation at Peniel and the second covenant at Bethel, Jacob's life becomes a life of trial, loss, sorrow, and difficulty. He had his glad beginning, during which his weak religion grew strong. He was now to have the storms which should root it deeply and give it the inward strength it needed. First he had lost Rachel's nurse, and wept for her. Now Rachel followed, and the man buried with her the romance of life, the memories of youth. Some of his sons then turned out ill, one insulting him shamefully; of the child of Rachel, the child that linked him to the passion of his life, he was bereaved, and bitter was that bereavement, for he suspected his sons of the deed. More and more lonely was his life; and when famine came upon the land, and Benjamin was asked for in Egypt, it seemed that the last blow was given.

This is the culmination of Jacob's time of sorrow. No doubt he had richly deserved sorrow by his conduct to his brother and his father; and sorrow had pursued him from the time of his deception of Isaac to the present. He had been tried and tested in the furnace of severe affliction and had borne the trial, had been cleansed, purified, strengthened by it; now, after one more short period of suspense, he was to receive his reward. A time of joy was before him; the misfortunes that had so severely taxed his endurance during his later years were to turn out blessings in disguise—Joseph, Simeon, Benjamin, were to be restored to him; he was to "taste and see how gracious the Lord is," and to feel in his inmost heart that "blessed is the man that trusteth in him." But for the present he had still during a brief space to suffer. All his sons quitted him. He was left alone—left in suspense for many weeks—a prey to fears, suspicions, surmises. Sick with hope deferred, the solitary patriarch waited day after day, longing for the return of his sons, or some of them, yet dreading what news they might bring.

¶ Nervous he naturally was — how could it be otherwise with such an organization? The spirit in him might well be compared to the flame of a candle consuming the material (a symbol an Eastern visitor once gave to him, and which he liked). The condition so well known to brain-workers induced at times an anxiety which was without reason. He made himself positively ill, and for many days—once when my train, shunted to allow numberless excursion trains to pass, delayed my return by some hours, and there was no possibility of telegraphing to explain what had happened. I remember that Sir Edward Burne-Jones told me that he himself never saw his dearest ones go out of the house without seeing them mentally carried back on a stretcher![1]

IV.

The Journey to Egypt.

1. For more than twenty years Jacob mourned for Joseph as dead. The monotony of those years was broken only by new misfortunes, which came upon each other's heels, as the messengers of calamity to Job. But the night of weeping was followed by the morning of joy. Joy looked in at the old man's window; and sorrow and sighing fled away. What a confusion of emotion must have filled his heart when his sons stood once again before him with such amazing tidings! Benjamin was there, and Simeon. Love had welded them together in the furnace of sorrow, like a twelve-linked chain, no link of which would ever again be missing. The God of their fathers had met with them; and henceforward would supply their needs so fully, that they could have no further lack, though the famine should last thrice seven years. And, above all, Joseph was yet alive; and he was governor over all the land of Egypt. What wonder that the aged heart stood still, and its machinery almost threatened to break down, beneath the pressure of sudden rapture. At first he could not believe it all. But the sight of the waggons convinced him. Then there came forth a gleam of the royal spirit of faith—the spirit of Jacob revived, and *Israel* said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die."

It was a momentous resolution. He was called upon to

[1] *George Frederick Watts*, ii. 205.

abandon, for an indefinite period, the land which God had given him as the heir of His promise. With very great toil and not a little danger had Jacob won his way back to Canaan from Mesopotamia; on this return he had spent the best years of his life, and now he was resting there in his old age, having seen his children's children, and expecting nothing but a peaceful departure to his fathers. But suddenly the waggons of Pharaoh stand at his tent-door, and while the parched and bare pastures bid him go to the plenty of Egypt, to which the voice of his long-lost son invites him, he hears a summons which, however trying, he cannot disregard.

2. Even when he started on his journey, Jacob would seem to have been doubtful as to his proper course, or even, as has been said, "engaged in eager debate as to the path of duty." Abraham, when in Egypt, had been brought into great danger; Isaac had been forbidden to go thither. Moreover, Egypt was not only a heathen land, but one in which idolatry had long been practised and had assumed gross forms of a revolting character. Still, it would seem, though in much doubt, he determined to go—he quitted Hebron, and "took his journey with all that he had," and proceeding southwards to the extreme limits of the Holy Land, to the very verge of the Desert, halted at Beersheba. There, his doubts were ended. During many years of solitary sorrow he had had no vision of the Highest. Earthly pain had absorbed him as it often absorbs us, and he was in danger of losing God had it tortured him much longer. He was growing inwardly in strength, unconsciously; but had no delight come to transfigure his soul, he might now have broken down in misery. Therefore God came to him upon a tide of joy, and the old spiritual Presence that had met him at Bethel and Peniel was realized again. As he passed by Beersheba, he offered sacrifices; God spake to him in the visions of the night, and again confirmed his promise, adding to it words that told him his long sorrow was remembered by God, and that God was partaker of his joy. "I will go down with thee into Egypt; . . . and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." It was the last of the visions. God came no more outwardly, for He needed not. In the new peace and joy of life, Jacob felt God for ever dwelling in his heart. The Omnipresent One had come to abide

in him as a well-loved guest who would have the closest spiritual union with him. The work had been done; the long education was finished. It only remained for him in quiet contemplation to re-live the past, to round into perfection within himself all he had been taught, to look forward with ever-brightening hope to death and God.

3. It was with such knowledge and such feelings that Jacob went down into Egypt, and came into the presence of Pharaoh. What a strange apparition to pass so calmly and unconsciously into the presence of a king; to stand in its grand and fresh simplicity amid the worldly splendours and exact formalities of a court! This pastoral chieftain, his raiment fragrant of the pastures, his eyes bedimmed with age, his withered face lined and furrowed with the marks of a vast and varied experience, must have seemed to the Egyptian courtiers like a being from another world. Something, indeed, of the awe and strangeness of this feeling appears in Pharaoh's question, "How many are the days of the years of thy life?"—words in which there is a tone as it were of softness and wonder, as if the king would fain realize, in the drawing out of his phrase, the many days of those long years through which the patriarch had lived and struggled and suffered. It was just the kind of question, and just the mode of putting it, to awaken in the patriarch's mind the thousand slumbering memories of the past. Throwing back his gaze over that sad and chequered history which we have reviewed, he sees it at length in its true character. Not by any means such a course as he had once dreamed of, when he had schemed and deceived to secure it —brilliant, successful, victorious! No! "Few and evil," he answers, "have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

At length Jacob sees what life is—not a march of warriors, not even a joyous harvest of the years; but only a pilgrimage; a passing through and not abiding; yea, the passing through a desert, where the patches of verdure are few, and the hot stretches of sand many and interminable; not a home for a man to lay up his treasure in, but a country strange and barren, to be traversed and left behind.

¶ That life is so short and so sad is the universal complaint. What is any man's? A pilgrimage, a tale that is told, a hand-breadth, a dream, a sleep, a vapour, a shadow, a fading flower, a wind, nothing, vanity. That is empirical life as all men find it. "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!"

> A moment's halt, a momentary taste,
> Of being from the well amid the waste,
> And lo! the phantom caravan has reached
> The nothing it set out from—Oh, make haste!

Is life itself, then, evil? Does Jacob, whose days have been few and evil, think so? Is he one of "the weary pessimists, life's tired-out guests," who cry that life is not worth living. No, it is only *his* life, or any actual man's life, that is evil. Life, the gift of God, is worthy of the Giver. To every true Hebrew and every true man life is essentially, wonderfully good—if only it were longer, and we better! Our sorrowful complaint that our days are few and evil is the pathetic evidence of the presence in every human soul of a craving for life as God meant it to be—an ideal, a perfect life. We hunger and thirst for it—for a life sweet, and pure, and everlasting.[1]

¶ Some have the great grace given them of late years to go in and out, to lie down and rise up, always staff in hand, like apostles on pilgrimage—always with loins girt, never with more in the purse than will carry them one stage on, never with more in their wardrobe than the daily wear. Like Wesley, if they are suddenly taken, they have left no engagements unfulfilled, they have no letters to answer, or matters to arrange. The children they leave cannot but talk about them as if they had just been seen off on some happy excursion; no farewells to say, no tears to be shed; nothing but to go after them in a day or two.[2]

V.

Death and Burial.

1. For seventeen years more Jacob lived an old age serene and bright, within a fertile land. The sunset is the fairest time of rainy days, the calmest of tempestuous ones; and Jacob's sunset

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 144.
[2] R. W. Barbour, *Thoughts*, 133.

life was so fair and calm that the memory of all his storm but enhanced his peace. It is a pleasant picture to dwell on: the old man outliving his last years in a stillness broken only by the visits of his children, honoured of Pharaoh, at peace with his household, watching the swift growth of his race in the pastoral life in Goshen, basking in the sunshine of those rainless skies.

As he draws nearer to his end, the halo round his withered brow glows with yet brighter colours. The sorrows of the past are a departing vision; the bitter breaking up of his life from the tent of Isaac and the companionship of his mother; the cruel treachery of Laban; the loss of Rachel, the well-beloved wife; the quarrels and the scandals of his family—all, one by one, melt away in the distance. The one remaining and ever-increasing idea of that life is the presence of God with it; the vision before his going down into Egypt gradually expands over and covers the canvas; other voices die away; this only he hears—"I am God, the God of thy father; fear not . . . I will go down with thee into Egypt."

¶ We were with the Rasūl on a journey, and some men stood up repeating aloud, "God is most great"; and the Rasūl said, "O men! be easy on yourselves, and do not distress yourselves by raising your voices; verily you do not call to one deaf or absent, but verily to one who heareth and seeth; and He is with you; and He to whom you pray is nearer to you than the neck of your camel."[1]

¶ Is God's presence a practical power in our lives? Does it ever try a fall with some strong sin and come off conqueror? Is it a principle of life for us? Does it come into our calculations and rule our estimate of things? Does it rise within us ever like a fountain of fresh force when we find ourselves near one in need of help? Does it sometimes surprise us with its suddenness of assistance, its strange opportunity of aid? Does it fill our future for us? Is life for us a growing experience of getting to know God? Does His presence subdue our hopes and pacify our fears? Does it rule our action towards others? Does it ever lower the lifted arm or arrest the hasty judgment? Is God's will a reality? Does our will ever give way to it? Are we seeing our lives grow like it? Are we getting clearer and clearer sights of it, and more and more strength to *do* it, when it is seen?[2]

[1] *The Sayings of Muhammad* (*ed.* Al-Suhrawardy), 116.
[2] R. W. Barbour, *Thoughts*, 76.

2. Then "the time drew nigh that Israel must die"; and his one thought, oftentimes repeated, was that his bones should not rest in that strange land; not in pyramid or painted chamber, but in the cell that he "had digged for himself," in the primitive sepulchre of his fathers. "Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: but I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace."

The request indicates a sense of approaching dissolution, and at the same time a lively faith in the promises of God to himself and his descendants—a conviction that they would not always remain exiles in Egypt, but would return one day to their own "promised land," there to continue a great and powerful people until their destiny was accomplished. It was his desire to cast in his lot with his people. The glories of an Egyptian funeral, of embalming, of a gorgeous mummy-case and a richly ornamented sepulchral chamber, perhaps surmounted by a handsome monument, did not tempt him for a moment to swerve from his design: he would be buried in the dim and bare "cave of Machpelah" at Hebron, "*with his fathers*," with Abraham, and Isaac, and Sarah, and Rebekah, and Leah, in the tomb that Abraham bought of Ephron the Hittite, together with the field wherein it lay, for a possession of a burying-place.

And round his dying bed the powers of the world to come arrayed themselves, and there fell on him the breath of clear, exalted prophecy. From the shadows of his own coming end, his eye ranged along the ages until, in prophetic foresight, he saw the Conqueror of death. A stranger himself, tarrying for a season in the land of ancient sovereignties, he speaks of his own race, though yet subject, as royal, and of its rule as universal: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

¶ In many pictures of the Crucifixion—that of Guido Reni, for instance, in the Vatican, which more than any other affects the general public—a skull is found lying at the foot of the Cross. The skull placed there is supposed to be that of Adam, and expresses the early tradition that Christ was crucified in the place where Adam was buried. This is alluded to by St. Chrysostom: "Some say that Adam died there and there lieth,

and that Jesus in that place where death had reigned, there also set up the trophy of victorious life. . For He went forth bearing the Cross as a trophy over the tyranny of death, and as conquerors do, so bare He upon His shoulders the symbol of victory."[1]

3. How beautiful, at last, was Jacob's death! The Bible does not deal much with details of death-scenes, but we may well be thankful that Jacob's is portrayed so vividly and minutely. We see him dying, but as a conqueror! There is no tremor of fear now. With loving regard, he alternately warns and encourages his sons, and bestows his parting benediction; and on his sons' sons, likewise, the dying patriarch invokes the blessing of Him, the Covenant Angel of Peniel, who, as he said, had redeemed him from all evil. Then quietly, and with princely dignity, he yields his spirit up to God. Joy and peace had done on him their consoling, blessed work. He was fit to be gathered to his fathers—the ambitious, pushing, passionate, suffering heart was at rest at last; the education was completed.

¶ As we look back now upon the long and sometimes anxious waiting of those autumn weeks, with their eager interchange at first of hopes and fears, the memory seems altogether bright. There was a long and peaceful glow about the sunset of Tait's life, and the days were never days of gloom. I may be allowed, perhaps, to quote a page from the diary of his youngest daughter; she, too, has since then passed to join him in the larger world beyond.

"After that Sunday evening service," she writes, "in which he bid us pray for him in the village church, we had three more months of quiet watching and waiting: watching and waiting first with a hope that, though slowly, he was surely gaining ground, and would, in God's love, be with us some time more, doing more work here for Him: watching and waiting afterwards for the day and hour of the home-going as the work here was done, well done, and finished in God's love. How thankful we all are for those months! It was a quiet happy time in spite of the anxiety and need of patience both for him and us. . . . They will be a help to us all our life, I think, those quiet watchings: such a feeling of peace, of finished work, and of waiting for the Master's call to go home. We always feel as if we had spent that time like the pilgrims in the Land of Beulah, waiting for

[1] J. Burns, *Illustrations from Art* (1912), 37.

the messenger and the crossing of the river, and he was like Mr. Stand-fast, for 'the day he was to cross, there was a great calm at that time in the river,' and the river was so quiet and so shallow that 'he stood a long time in the water talking to those who had come with him to the water's edge.'"[1]

4. We are expressly told in the Epistle to the Hebrews that Jacob was one of those who "died in faith." He was the heir of Promise. The land promised to Abraham and Isaac had not as yet passed into his possession; it was still held by the wandering and settled tribes, who had eyed his journeyings with such evident suspicion. All he had was the assured promise that in the coming days it should be his through his seed. As the years passed on he was compelled to realize that he would never live to be lord of Canaan. Nevertheless, he clung tenaciously to the blessed promise, so often reiterated to Abraham, that the land should become his people's; and his assurance that God would keep His word flung over his dying moments a radiance which neither sorrow nor adversity could dim. Oh, glorious faith! which carries a torch through the long catacombs of sorrow, keeping the heart from fainting, until the welcome dawn of accomplishment grows upon the sight. So Jacob, as he neared the City of God, so dear to faithful hearts, approved his kinsmanship with the elect spirits of all ages, by reaching forth towards it his aged, trembling hands. And as God looked down upon that eager attitude of faith, and hope, and desire, He was not ashamed to be called his God. Have we Jacob's faith? When the end comes will it come as calmly? Will it come with like assurance?

The red-rose flush fades slowly in the west.
The golden water, basking in the light,
Pales to clear amber and to silver white.
The velvet shadow of a flame-crowned crest
Lies dark and darker on its shining breast,
Till lonely mere and isle and mountain-height
Grow dim as dreams in tender mist of night,
And all is tranquil as a babe at rest.

[1] *Life of Archibald Campbell Tait, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ii. 597.

So still! So calm! Will our life's eve come thus?
No sound of strife, of labour or of pain,
No ring of woodman's axe, no dip of oar.
Will work be done, and night's rest earned, for us?
And shall we wake to see sunrise again?
Or shall we sleep, to see and know no more?[1]

[1] Ada Cambridge, *The Hand in the Dark* (1913), 122.

ESAU.

I.

Esau's History.

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Esau's History.

He did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: so Esau despised his birthright.—Gen. xxv. 34.

In all Scripture there are few characters more profitable for our study than the elder son of Isaac and Rebekah. The composite form in which his story has reached us was not finished for hundreds of years after the era to which he belonged. And it may be those are right who assert that there have been painted into the portrait of the man features derived from the probable etymologies of the names of his descendants—for Edom may mean *red*; Esau and Seir (the land he inhabited) may mean *hairy*—and that his character is, in part, the reflection of the qualities which his descendants developed in opposition to Israel. The Edomites were at first little more than hunters and warriors, of an impulsive and desperate temper—a temper, like their land, full of precipices, and bare, too, of the more spiritual elements of character. They had their gods and their high places, of course; but their religion is singular among those of the peoples of Syria in exerting almost no fascination on Israel's mind. The Edomites do not appear to have had any faculty in that direction. The few personages they gave to history, among whom the Herods are conspicuous, were coarse, unscrupulous, ruthless, without any interest in religion, except what was dictated by policy. No better word could describe this people than "profane." Yet the parallel between Esau and the nation he founded is far from perfect. Some of their qualities do not appear in his portrait—their commercial gifts, the worldly wisdom for which they were famed, and that brazen pitilessness which the prophets and psalmists, many centuries ago, unanimously attributed to them. The Esau of our story is a facile character, simple and placable. Such a difference is hardly explained by the theory that those notorious qualities of

the Edomites were not thrust upon the experience of Israel till after the composition of Esau's picture, but rather by the fact that his story as it stands is not the reflection, always more or less vague, of the surface of the nation, but the record, keener, deeper, and more tragic, of the character and experience of an individual.

In this lies its value for ourselves. Whether we look at his circumstances, or his chances, or his temper, or the line along which the tragedy of his life is drawn, we find with Esau more that resembles the pitiful facts and solemn possibilities of our own experience than we do with almost any other character in either of the Testaments. Here is a man who was not an insane or monstrous sinner—a Lucifer falling from heaven—but who came to sin in the common, human way; by birth into it, by the sins of others as well as his own, by everyday and sordid temptations, by carelessness and the sudden surprise of neglected passions. Esau is not a repulsive but an attractive man; and we know that if we are to learn from any character our love must be awake, and take her share in the task. There is everything to engage us in the study of him. The mystery which shrouds all human sin, our own experience of temptation, the regret we feel for so wronged and genial a nature—these only serve to make more clear to us the central want and blame of his life. And this may be our own.

If we had been left to form our own opinion of the character of Esau without any aid beyond the bare facts which are recorded, we should probably have come to a very different conclusion from that which we find in the Bible. There the estimate given of his character is set down in no uncertain terms; for the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in writing to them, warns them to look diligently, "lest any man fail of the grace of God"—"lest there be any profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." Had it not been for this explanation we could not well understand why it should be said, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

There are few sadder stories than the history of Esau. Had his character been less attractive, his fall would have excited less pity. If his prospects had not been so brilliant, his fate would have been less terrible. But it is the combination of these two circumstances in the narrative—the ruin of a character which we

are disposed to admire, and the unspeakable value of the birthright and the blessing which he recklessly threw away—that gives the interest to the story, and rivets our attention on the lesson which it contains. The destruction of so many bright hopes, the dissipation of so many glorious visions, the hopeless and irrevocable ruin of one so simple and honest and open-hearted —what can be more touching than this?

I.

The Birthright.

So Esau despised his birthright.—Gen. xxv. 34.

1. Let us look at Esau before he sold his birthright. The Sovereign Lord of all had elected Abraham, on account of his conspicuous faith, to be at once the father of the faithful, and the ancestor, humanly speaking, of the Christ. Alone of all the human race, the glory of God, His Presence, His covenant were to be with that isolated, wandering family. This mighty privilege and pre-eminence were to be handed down in the direct line of his descendants. They were to possess the land, to increase as the stars of Heaven; from them was to spring the Desire of all nations, and as such God's special care, guardianship, and revelation of Himself were pledged to them. Of this line Esau was the firstborn. The inheritance was his. There was no man living whose true dignity was so high, whose hopes were so bright, who was brought so near to God.

To the birthright belonged pre-eminence over the other branches of the family. To the birthright appertained a double portion of the paternal inheritance. To the birthright was attached the land of Canaan, with all its sacred distinctions. To the birthright was given the promise of being the ancestor of the Messiah—the "firstborn among many brethren"—the Saviour in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. And to the birthright was added the honour of receiving first, from the mouth of the father, a peculiar benediction, which, proceeding from the spirit of prophecy, was never pronounced in vain. Such were the prospects of Esau.

2. The incident in which we first come across Esau is altogether typical of the man. It fell upon a day, what must indeed have been an incident of almost every day between the brothers, that Esau with his arrows, his quiver, and his bow, came back from the excitements and enjoyment of the chase, back to the tents, where Jacob had as usual been performing the daily round, tending the flocks, serving the household, preparing the meal. And Esau's eyes fell upon the broth, the red lentil soup, made ready by his brother's hands. He was hungry and thirsty, heated from the chase. In his eagerness he cried: "Let me swallow," or "gulp down"—it is a greedy word—"some of this red, this red stuff, for I am faint." And Jacob said: "Sell me first of all thy birthright." And Esau said: "Lo, I am going to die, and what profit shall the birthright do to me!" But Jacob said: "First of all, swear to me!" One sees the hard look with which he spoke. "So he sware to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil-pottage, and he ate and drank, and went his way"—his large, careless way! "Thus Esau despised his birthright." Look at the two habits which came to a fatal crisis in that speech: the habit of yielding to appetite, and the habit of indulging in exaggerated feelings about oneself. "I am at the point to die!" We cannot believe it of the strong man. We hear in him his mother's unscrupulous voice. These two selfishnesses, physical and mental, fostered through a thousand half-conscious and now forgotten acts, sprang that moment to fatal empire, and at their bidding the deluded man sold his birthright—sold the future and his honour, just because the sight of a mess of pottage had mounted to his unhallowed brain.

(1) This was probably not the first time that Esau and Jacob had exchanged words about that birthright. No man sells his birthright on the spot. He who sells his birthright sells it many times in his heart before he takes it so openly as that to the market. He belittles it, and despises it, and cheapens it, at any rate to himself, long before he sells it so cheaply to another. No man, and no woman, falls in that fatal way without having prepared their fall for themselves in their hearts. Esau had showed his contempt for his birthright a thousand times, and in a thousand ways, before now. Everybody knew that Esau's

birthright was for sale, if anybody cared to bid for it. Isaac knew, Rebekah knew, and Jacob knew; and Jacob had for long been eyeing his brother for a fit opportunity. It had for a long time back been marrow to Jacob's bones to hear Esau jesting so openly about his birthright over his venison and his wine; jesting and being jested about the covenant blessing. "As much as you are able to eat, Esau! and anything else you like to name, to boot; only, say that you toss me to-day your worthless birthright," said Jacob. "Take it, and welcome!" said Esau. "And much good may it do you! It has never been worth a haunch of good venison to me. You may have it, and my oath on it on the spot, for a good dish at once, and be quick, of your smoking pottage. Take it, and let me be done with it. Take it, and let me hear no more about it." And Esau "did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way."[1]

¶ A Highland gentleman, a younger branch of a family, once consulted me if he could not validly purchase the chieftainship of his family, from the chief, who was willing to sell it. I told him it was impossible for him to acquire, by purchase, a right to be a different person from what he really was; for the right of the chieftainship attached to the blood of primogeniture, and, therefore, was incapable of being transferred. I added, that though Esau sold his birthright, or the advantages belonging to it, he still remained the first-born of his parents; and that whatever agreement a chief might make with any of the clan, the Heralds' Office could not admit of the metamorphosis, or with any decency attest that the younger was the elder: but I did not convince the worthy gentleman.[2]

(2) This selling of the birthright must have been more serious than even we can conceive, or the sacred writers would not have used such strong language in condemning it. It must have been considered as nothing short of an insult to Jehovah. There was, however, no *aggressive* insult displayed by Esau. He did not deny the existence of the birthright, but, as the Scriptures say, he despised it. He did not rightly value it; he counted it as nothing. He had no appreciation of such things. He was sense-bound, living only in the present, debtor only to the material. If Esau's conscience had been in any real way aroused,

[1] A. Whyte.

[2] Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, i. 196.

if he had realized, however feebly, the responsibility of his position, he certainly, after he had eaten, would have reflected that he had paid too high for his pottage, and that Jacob had taken an unfair advantage of him. He would then have endeavoured by fair means to undo the foolish deed. He would have exposed Jacob's conduct to his father, or remonstrated with Jacob that he should make some compensation. Had he done this he would have found a place of repentance, that is, he would have been able to reverse the bargain. But the foolish deed did not even stir Esau's conscience, much less move him to troublesome action. Esau was altogether unreflective.

(3) It may be urged as a palliation of the deed that the man was practically dying of hunger, that birthright and every other privilege were useless to him at this moment—"All that a man hath will he give for his life." This is true, and so far there seems to be some justification for Esau. But, as Aristotle long ago pointed out to us, a man may do a wrong action under compulsion and not be guilty; yet, if when he is released from the force which compelled him he shows no sorrow for his deed, and makes no attempt to rectify any evil that he has done, then the action is voluntary on his part, and he becomes as guilty of the deed as if he had performed it of his own free will. Now, this is the aggravation of Esau's sin. We are told that "he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way." There was no repentance, no sorrow, no regret for the loss of the immeasurable treasure.

The discovery of his loss did not come to him all at once. The great, strong hunter went forth, and hunted, and slept, and waked with the serene pulse of health, and what had he lost? The skies spread as fair above him, the mountains rose in the silence of their beauty as majestically around him, the blood leapt with all the old blissful magic in his veins as he hastened after the chase, his life went on as of yore, and what had he lost? If any higher quality had passed out of his life, he had not noticed it; it had passed like an unregarded shadow, and the sunlight seemed undimmed. And then at last there came that awful day, when his heart was broken within him, and the great judgment fell upon him, and the exceeding bitter cry rang out, praying for that which he had cast away, wailing in fruitless agony for

opportunities for ever squandered, "Bless me, even me also, O my father."

¶ Every reader profoundly sympathizes with Esau in his tragic sorrow, in which there is a deep pathos which is scarcely surpassed elsewhere even in the Bible, the most pathetic of all books. But his regrets were vain. An Apostle says that "he found no place of repentance," which means that there was no means of undoing what he had done. We "know that even when he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, though he sought it diligently with tears." Whatever the future might have in store for him, the past at least was irrevocable.

> The Moving Finger writes: and, having writ,
> Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
> Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Esau's exceeding loud and bitter cry sounds the needful note of alarm in a world in which so much evil is wrought for want of thought as well as want of will. He lost the coveted blessing because he despised the birthright. As George Eliot says: "It is in those acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are for ever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made, and say, The earth bears no harvest of sweetness."[1]

3. One thing only is recorded between the sale of the birthright and the day of the blessing. When Esau sold his birthright he had perhaps scarcely come to man's estate. We now read that when he was forty years old he took two wives, both Hittites —*i.e.* Canaanitish women of an idolatrous nation, for the Hittites were one of those seven nations of Canaan whom God afterwards cast out for their wickedness. These two wives were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah. It was an undutiful act on Esau's part if he knew his parents' mind; but this is not the most important thing about Esau's marriage. By marrying these two women he broke through one of the most important rules of life which had been given to the family whom God had chosen to inherit His blessing. Abraham was called of God to leave his country and his kindred because "they served other gods." When Isaac was to have a wife, his father made his servant swear that he

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 35.

would not take a wife of the daughters of the Canaanites. The reason is given in Deut. vii. 6, "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God." The people whom God had chosen were to be a separate people; if not, they could not inherit His blessing. Esau might have known the care which Abraham had taken to keep Isaac separate. And yet he behaved as if no such rule had ever existed, and married Canaanitish wives.

Now, Esau's marriage, fatal step as it also was, was not the passionate impulse of a moment, any more than his sale of his birthright had been. Esau had hunted for years with the brothers of Judith and Bashemath. He had eaten and drunk and danced with the Hittite inhabitants of the land. He had sacrificed and sworn and vowed to their false gods of the fields, and of the streams, and of the unclean groves. Like every reprobate from a better life, Esau had far outdone the sons of Beeri and Elon in their impieties and debaucheries, till at last, and in open defiance of all decency and religion, he brought home two Canaanite wives to his father's covenanted camp.

The place where the thing is recorded is remarkable. The narrative goes straight on from the record of the marriage to the story of the blessing, but we are not to suppose that the blessing was given to Jacob immediately after Esau's marriage. Between the end of Gen. xxvi. and the beginning of ch. xxvii. there is an interval of thirty-seven years. It is important to note this fact, because it shows the length of time allowed to Esau for repentance. Even after these marriages he was allowed a space of thirty-seven years to repent of his errors and to return to the appointed path. Every day of grace, however, has its appointed limit; and the end of Esau's day came at last—came most unexpectedly in a catastrophe which it was impossible to provide against, because it was altogether unforeseen.

There is in Esau's conduct and after-experience so much to stir serious thought that one always feels reluctant to pass from it, and that much more ought to be made of it. It reflects so many features of our own conduct, and so clearly shows us what we are from day to day liable to, that we would wish to take it with us through life as a perpetual admonition. Who does not know of those moments of weakness, when we are fagged with work, and with our physical energy our moral tone has become relaxed?

Who does not know how, in hours of reaction from keen and exciting engagements, sensual appetite asserts itself, and with what petulance we inwardly cry, we shall die if we do not get this or that paltry gratification? We are, for the most part, inconstant as Esau, full of good resolves to-day, and to-morrow throwing them to the winds—to-day proud of the arduousness of our calling, and girding ourselves to self-control and self-denial, to-morrow sinking back to softness and self-indulgence. Not once, as Esau, but again and again we barter peace of conscience and fellowship with God and the hope of holiness for what is, in simple fact, no more than a bowl of pottage. Even after recognizing our weakness and the lowness of our tastes, and after repenting with self-loathing and misery, some slight pleasure is enough to upset our steadfast mind, and make us as plastic as clay in the hand of circumstances. It is with positive dismay one considers the weakness and blindness of our hours of appetite and passion; how one goes then like an ox to the slaughter, all unconscious of the pitfalls that betray and destroy men, and how at any moment we ourselves may truly sell our birthright.

We barter life for pottage; sell true bliss
For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown;
Thus, Esau-like, our Father's blessing miss,
Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.

Our faded crown, despised and flung aside,
Shall on some brother's brow immortal bloom;
No partial hand the blessing may misguide,
No flattering fancy change our Monarch's doom

His righteous doom, that meek true-hearted Love
The everlasting birthright should receive,
The softest dews drop on her from above,
The righteous green her mountain garland weave:

Her brethren, mightiest, wisest, eldest born,
Bow to her sway, and move at her behest:
Isaac's fond blessing may not fall on scorn,
Nor Balaam's curse on Love, which God hath blest.[1]

[1] John Keble, *The Christian Year.*

II.

The Blessing.

And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him.—Gen. xxvii. 41.

1. The second point in the progress of Esau's ruin is this: His passion made him the prey of the first designing man he came across, who happened to be his own brother. As Isaac becomes old, his eyes grow dim. He takes this as a premonition that his end is approaching, that his course is well-nigh run. He summons Esau that he may prepare him a meal of venison before giving to him the covenant blessing. The fraud that was practised by Rebekah and Jacob is well-known. Isaac unwittingly gave Jacob the blessing; but having given it, he felt by the prophetic impulse which was upon him that he had been Divinely guided. "Yea, and he shall be blessed."

How intensely pathetic is the scene in which Esau, arriving, flushed and eager from the chase, at his old father's bedside, finds suddenly that the elder son's benediction has been given away from him during his absence, and with "a great and exceeding bitter cry," entreats for it in vain. There he kneels, the stalwart, sun-embrowned sportsman, sobbing like a child for the blessing—his title to which he had once thoughtlessly surrendered for a "morsel of meat"—and sobbing to no purpose, unable, for all his passionate yearnings after it *now*, to recover the lost good; unable, for all his passionate pleadings for it *now*, to wring it from the aged patriarch, who fain would have bestowed it and could not.

Esau could scarcely desire the blessing more earnestly for himself than his father desired it for him. But much as they both desired it, Isaac could not give the blessing to his firstborn, because it was no longer his to give. Father and son would have given all they had at that moment in order to obtain their desire, but it was utterly in vain. The blessing was gone already: it was no longer open to disposal. Esau found a loving father and a repenting heart, but he found no room to bring the repentance in. The repentance was there, but no words could unsay the solemn words of blessing spoken by Isaac to Jacob when Esau

was not there. Esau might have found room for the repentance if he had cared to seek it in due time. Either when he recovered himself after he sold the birthright, or any time before he married Canaanitish wives, or even after his marriage, during those thirty-seven years while his conduct was a grief to Isaac and Rebekah, he might have inquired what rules God had given for the chosen people, and severed himself, if necessary, from the connexion which stood in his way. For more than forty years Esau had opportunity for repentance, but he neglected it, he despised it, he did not heed it, and he let the time go by. At last he had no warning. He went out from the presence of his father, secure of his blessing; he came back, and lo, it was gone! Henceforth Jacob stood in the place of Esau.

Esau seems to have made in his own mind a certain distinction between the birthright and the blessing of his father. It is not easy to see what he meant by this, inasmuch as the blessing went with the birthright; and, in so far as it was a spiritual as distinct from a temporal blessing, it had (as Esau well knew) been promised by God to Jacob. But at all events the question of inheritance seemed to rise fully before Esau when his father fell sick and was thought to be dying: and an entire change came over him in consequence. He had cared nothing for it before; had even asked in contempt, "What profit shall this birthright do to me?" But now the thought of Isaac's death, and of what would happen to him afterwards, made all look different. To lose it and all that it covered; to lose the place of the elder son and the heir; to lose the double share of the inheritance, and see Jacob take it; to lose whatever else might be meant and included—these things were bitter to his soul. It was no matter that he had sold them all already; that he had made his bargain; that he had had his own named price. He could not bear to lose them now. And so the big, strong, foolish man bursts into a fit of weeping, and cries, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!"

His sorrow was not godly sorrow, but merely remorse on account of the temporal advantages which he had forfeited. His bitter grief was not on account of having despised the religion of Abraham and made light of the worship of Jehovah. While there is much in his character to admire, we have no hint to show us that God was in any of his thoughts. It was this that rendered

his repentance unavailing. He had no thought of having injured God. He thought only of the injury done to himself. It was his own personal loss that caused the exceeding bitter cry. There is nothing, therefore, in this rejection of Esau to lead us to suppose that it was done on mere arbitrary grounds. Isaac and Esau were alike disappointed. Esau saw only the supplanter, and vowed to be revenged. Isaac saw God in the matter, and trembled.

Of all the parties in this transaction none is more to blame than Esau. He shows now how selfish and untruthful the sensual man really is, and how worthless is the generosity which is merely of impulse and not based on principle. While he so furiously and bitterly blamed Jacob for supplanting him, it might surely have occurred to him that it was really he who was supplanting Jacob. He had no right, Divine or human, to the inheritance. God had never said that its possession should go to the oldest, and had in this case said the express opposite.

Besides, Esau had sold his birthright, and all its privileges, to his brother, and now he ought to have at least informed or reminded his father of the transaction when he proposed to give him his final and prophetic blessing. The sale of the birthright carried with it all the rights of primogeniture, and included the blessing of Abraham's seed in whom all the nations of the earth were thereafter to be blessed. In consenting therefore to present himself for the blessing of the father, he was breaking faith with his brother Jacob. But when he discovered that Jacob had by fraud secured that which ought now to have been voluntarily surrendered to him, we observe further indications of an unsanctified spirit. A spirit of unholy rage and fierce revenge seems to have possessed his soul. Disappointment did not work remembrance of sin, and lead to an acknowledgment of the righteousness of Providence; it produced rage and complaining, and that sorrow of the world which worketh death. His own misdeeds are forgotten in the crafty transaction by which he regards his brother as having defrauded him of his right. He is loud and vehement in his regrets, revengeful and impious in his heart, cruel and unjust in his threatenings. "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob."

2. Esau, we find, got some blessing—the sort of blessing he was fit for. He loved his father, and he was rewarded. "And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck."

Jacob's blessing contained temporal abundance, temporal rule, and spiritual blessing, the main points plainly being the rights of primogeniture. Esau's, in the first part identical with his brother's, was different afterwards by the want of spiritual blessing; God's gifts without God, the fruit of the earth and the plunder of the sword, but no connexion with the covenant of God. He was to live the free hunter's life which he loved; and we find that he soon became the head of a wild powerful tribe, and his sons after him. Dukes of Edom they were called for several generations; but they never rose to any solid and lasting power; they never became a great nation, as Jacob's children did. They were just what one would expect—wild, unruly, violent people. They have long since perished utterly off the face of the earth.

3. There is one pleasing incident recorded of Esau—his reconciliation with Jacob. When they met some years after, Esau in his new life had forgotten all, and he met Jacob as if nothing had happened. His anger was gone, he felt no envy of his brother's riches, he was even unwilling to accept his present. If, when he set out with his four hundred men to meet Jacob, there was any anger remaining in him, it was all dispersed at the sight of his brother. A quick change of feeling is quite consistent with his warm and impetuous character.

¶ Esau's anger, while it lasted, was dark and fierce, and during the mad fit it was wise to keep out of his way. "Being wrought," he was "perplexed in the extreme," like another man of simple, heroic character. His impetuosity made him dangerous. But he was not a man who nursed his wrath. No one would call him sullenly vindictive. If ever he declared that he would do something desperate to an enemy, and did not do it at once, he invariably forgot that he meant to do it at all. He was as changeful in his hatred as in his love. He lived in the passing moment;

his blood quickly boiled and quickly cooled: and he was as easily led into good as into evil.[1]

4. At Isaac's grave the two brothers Jacob and Esau met for the last time. Then their ways parted asunder. They became nations, and, centuries after, these nations met when Israel, on his way from Egypt to Canaan, stood at the gates of Mount Seir, asking permission to pass through the borders of the inhabitants of Edom, Esau's people. Moses reminded the king of Edom of the consanguinity of both peoples and of Israel's troubles in Egypt. But the king refused to allow them to pass through, and came out against Israel with a strong hand. The suspicion against Israel was too strong. Here Israel bore the sin of their ancestor, who had taken unfair advantage of Esau. No word of blame against Esau finds expression in the Mosaic records. We read only: "Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border." Also, later on, Israel is exhorted to treat Edom as a brother. Thus Israel was obliged to make a long and wearisome detour round Mount Seir, crossing the border of Edom in the east. Here they could have revenged themselves for Edom's refusal. The country was different, and Israel's force would have overwhelmed Edom's. But Israel acted after the Lord's command, and passed in peace through the country, purchasing food and water from the Edomites. Moses' politics were directed by the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is a Spirit of reconciliation. Here Edom was rewarded for Esau's noble conduct towards his brother Jacob by Israel's considerate action. Thus recompense has absolute rule in the history of these nations.

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 36.

ESAU.

II.

Esau's Character.

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Esau's Character.

Lest there be any . . . profane person, as Esau, who for one mess of meat sold his own birthright. For ye know that even when he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected (for he found no place of repentance), though he sought it diligently with tears.—Heb. xii. 16, 17.

Esau was sinned against from his birth. The problems of heredity and of a stress of temptation, for which he was not to blame, appear in his case from the first. His father and mother were responsible for much of the character of their son. Isaac's and Rebekah's life was the spoiling of one of the most beautiful idylls ever opened on this earth of ours. Their love began in a romance, and ended in vulgarity. It began with the most honourable plighting of troth, and it ended in the most sordid querulousness and falsehood. That can only have been because, from the first, with all its grace and wonder, the fear of God was not present; because there was more romance than religion, and with the giving of the one heart to the other there was little surrender of both to God. We see a divided house; the father and older son on one side, the mother and younger son on the other; the father unable to bless his children till he has enjoyed a favourite dish; the mother taking advantage of her husband's blindness to cheat him and her older son, and training the younger to a selfish and cruel dissimulation. Is this Rebekah? The girl whose pure heart leapt at the stranger's story of love is become the exaggerating, lying woman. It is the result of living on mere feeling. Of such a mother Esau was born. He never showed her falseness, but he had all her impetuous haste, and he proved it with his man's strength. In her it had been an easy sense of the meaning and consequences of sin; a facile unscrupulousness about other people's rights, even when these other people were her husband and her son—in short, a want of the sense of God and

His government of life. But although it was his own rights of which Esau was forgetful, the unscrupulousness which he showed was the same: the same forgetfulness of God and His restraint; the same disregard of consequences. And they ruined him.

Making allowance for the rude habits of the patriarchal age, Esau is not essentially different in character from a very large number among ourselves. He has just the same virtues, and just the same faults. He is the father's favourite son. He is born to great hopes. He has brilliant prospects before him. His career is in his own hands. His lot may well be envied by others. But all is thrown away upon him. He is reckless of his opportunities. He is insensible to his blessings. He loses everything by one desperate act of folly. He finds out too late the value of what he has lost. He would give anything to recover it, when recovering it is hopeless. And yet his character is far from utterly vicious. Of such a man we might say that he is no one's enemy but his own. If his bad passions are strong, his impulses for good are strong also. If he is reckless and undisciplined, he is simple and honest and open-hearted. He is, in short, not so very much worse —perhaps not at all worse—than a great number who are admired and loved among ourselves, and whose manifest faults are forgiven for the sake of many rough virtues and generous affections.

¶ Esau, as we all feel, stands out to great advantage beside Jacob. He is brave, generous, open-handed, chivalrous, loved by Isaac—the kind of man that impersonates the popular virtues. And he has the added good fortune of being the eldest son. To him the birthright belonged. Life is peculiarly free to him. He has neither Jacob's physical weakness nor his moral limitations. Instinctively we like him, in spite of his disregard of the great promises that were bound up with his race. But he is as much indebted to his ancestry for the good that lies in him as Jacob for his vices. Abraham's courage and generosity reappear in him, as Laban's deceit in Jacob. He is not to be more praised than Jacob is to be blamed. Both have to some extent made the original stock which came to them their own; and the question as we see them standing at the outset of their careers is, what will they do with that which they have? It is possible for Esau to become a second Abraham, and for Jacob to become a man like the Fagin of Dickens or the Shylock of Shakespeare. It is likely that Esau will become Israel; and Jacob become a Judas, if he retains, indeed, a place in history at all. And yet the very

opposite is what we see. Jacob becomes Israel, and Esau the founder of a people long since perished, unless they are that predatory people who to this day are the terror of Palestine. The Edomite all through the centuries maintains his profane secularity, his hostility to God and His plans. The spirit is seen in our Lord's time, in the shifty, cunning Herod who sought His infant life; in the cowardly insincerity of the man who heard the Baptist and yet executed him; in the sensual Herod Agrippa, who was moved by St. Paul and yet went back to his sin.[1]

I.

A Cunning Hunter.

1. We are told that Esau was "a cunning hunter, a man of the field." Esau was full of the manliest interests and occupations and pursuits. He was a very proverb of courage and endurance and success in the chase. He was the ruggedest, the brawniest, and the shaggiest of all the rugged, brawny, and shaggy creatures of the field and of the forest, among whom he lived and died. Esau had an eye like an eagle. His ear never slept. His foot took the firmest hold of the ground. And his hand was always full of skill, and strength, and success. Esau's arrow never missed its mark. He was the pride of all the encampment as he came home at night with his traps, and his snares, and his bows, and his arrows, and laden to the earth with venison for his father's supper. Burned black with the sun, beaten hard and dry with the wind, a prince of men, a prime favourite with men and women and children, and with a good word and a good gift from the field for them all.

2. So far we know nothing wrong of Esau. In those days the chase was no idle amusement, but for those who followed it a serious and necessary employment, full of many perils, and a means of providing for daily food. The impulses indeed of Jacob were nobler and more spiritual impulses, but those of Esau, although animal, were not intrinsically immoral. Strength, and speed, and courage, and endurance, are blessings not lightly to be despised; but he who confines his ideal to them, as Esau did, chooses a low

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *Personality and Power*, 94.

ideal, and one which can bring a man but little peace at the last. Vigour and strength, and other physical gifts may be an innocent, even a glorious, crown round the brows of manhood; but they never can be so if they are sought exclusively, if they are not united to other and better things. In themselves there was nothing wrong in Esau's tastes, but he reaches only half the blessing of a man, and that the meaner and temporal half: "the other half, that he is made in the image of an invisible Being," that he has the awful gift of immortality, and a life beyond the grave, seems seldom or never to have entered into his thoughts. Narrow life spanned his hopes and expectations; the impure earth yielded him all its joy.

¶ The Hebrews were never lacking in admiration of physical strength, agility, daring; and the sportsman had an undisputed place in a land abounding with the wild creatures of the chase. Ruddy, shaggy, brawny, fearless and impetuous, Esau was an ideal huntsman. But there was a serious flaw in his character. So much did he enjoy the warm, sensuous, earthy side of things that he had no thought of the awakening of the soul. He was a "profane person," not in the sense of taking God's name in vain,—there is no suggestion of that,—but in the sense of never feeling and recognizing God's claims upon him at all.[1]

¶ There is a frank animalism, an outspoken earthiness, in the romances of Morris, which is wholly beautiful, because of its frankness and simplicity. The people of Morris-land are naked and not ashamed.[2]

II.

An Uncontrolled Temper.

1. Oil and water would sooner mix than Jacob and Esau, and the weakness in Esau's character which makes him so striking a contrast to his brother is his *inconstancy*.

> That one error
> Fills him with faults; makes him run through all the sins.

By firmness of will Jacob could in the end win any quality that Esau had; whereas Esau, having no strength of will, might

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 17.

[2] A. Compton-Rickett, *William Morris* (1913), 174.

lose everything he possessed. It depended solely on how the winds and the tides of life led, how much he kept, how much he lost. Esau is led by impulse, betrayed by appetite, everything by turns and nothing long. To-day despising his birthright, to-morrow breaking his heart for its loss; to-day vowing he will murder his brother, to-morrow falling on his neck and kissing him; a man one cannot reckon upon, and of too shallow a nature for anything to root itself deeply in.

2. Esau is the type of man who, without any deliberate intention to do evil, is too careless to do what is right. His good points were simply such as were natural to him, and consequently were no trouble to him. In them he was but little tempted. There is no trace of any discipline in his life. He has no struggle at all. He simply gives the rein to his impulse and follows it wherever it leads. Whatever he fancies, he will have, regardless of cost. The right or the wrong of the thing is not considered—he simply desires it, and he will have it. Does his old father express a wish about his marriage? He will go straightway and oppose it. Does his fancy lead him to desire a bowl of appetising lentil soup? Then he will have it, if he has to pay the price of his birthright for it.

I see them troop away; I ask
  Were they in sooth mine enemies—
Terror, the doubt, the lash, the task?
  What heart has my new housemate, Ease?

How am I left, at last, alive,
  To make a stranger of a tear?
What did I do one day to drive
  From me the vigilant angel, Fear?

The diligent angel, Labour? Ay,
  The inexorable angel, Pain?
Menace me, lest indeed I die,
Sloth! Turn; crush, teach me fear again![1]

3. Esau had made his own misfortune, and when it came upon him, he broke out into the exceeding bitter cry, "Hast thou but one

[1] Alice Meynell, *Poems* (1913), 113.

blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father!" Very pitiful, it is true, but we cannot help a touch of scorn coming with the pity. We see that the exceeding bitter cry is nothing more than the same passion, on another matter, which broke out with equal violence when he would have the pottage as the only good in life, and our lip cannot help curling with contempt. And feeble and violent as it was, it did not last, at least the bitterness and remorse in it passed away. It was too deep a feeling for that weak heart to retain, and it changed into anger with Jacob, whose life he threatened when his father's death should come. But even this did not endure; Esau had not the power of will to keep his thought of vengeance to himself, he went muttering it about the encampment, and when Rebekah heard of it she smiled. "Go," she said to Jacob, with a fine irony, "until thy brother's anger turn away, and he forget that which thou hast done to him." And it did turn away. The passion of Esau was not worth a thought, it swept over him like the April shower on a stormy day which is dried up in a few hours. But the character which is worth knowing and having, and which will move others and fulfil its aim, is his whom passion inundates, so that its flood, not drying up, but sinking down into the soil of the heart, forms, deep below, springs that slowly change into sweet waters, and rise long afterwards to the surface, to fertilize the later autumn of life.

¶ People say: "You cannot change the basis of character." But you may combine opposites to almost any extent: and it is the combination of opposites which makes greatness. The art is to add age to youth and youth to age, to be all you ever were, and to add on something more (as far as physical strength will allow). Distinctly to recognize: "I have a certain character; I will add to that new qualities."[1]

III.

A Profane Person.

1. In Heb. xii. 16 we are told that Esau was a *profane person.* The Greek word means literally that which "may be trodden"; that which is unfenced and open to the feet of all. It was applied to ground outside sacred enclosures and temples: ground that was

[1] *Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, 242.

common and public. *Profane*—that which is in front of the fane or temple—is therefore its adequate translation. Esau's was an open heart, naturally open and unreserved. We all know the kind of man. He has fifty doors to the outer world where most of us have but two or three. And except angels be sent to guard them, the peril and ill-omen of such a man are very great. But instead of angels, Esau had by him only tempters—a tempter in his brother, a tempter in his mother. Unguarded by loving presences, unfilled by worthy affections, his mind became a place across which everything was allowed to rush; across which the commonest passions, like hunger, ran riot unawed by any commanding principles. That is what is meant by a "profane person": an open and a bare character; unfenced and unhallowed; no guardian angels at the doors, no gracious company within, no fire upon the altar, but open to his passions, his mother's provocations, and his brother's wiles.

2. Esau had no vision of spiritual things, and would seem to offer no prayer. He did not deny the reality of the soul, but he knew not those obstinate questionings, inarticulate yearnings,

> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
> Are yet a master-light of all our seeing.

As a city without a temple was Esau in his whole being. In him there was no sanctuary where dwell those high instincts before which our mortal nature doth "tremble like a guilty thing surprised."

(1) Esau showed his profanity in not recognizing the spiritual value of his birthright. He used it as a common thing; as if it were a piece of money, he put its worth down as equal to a mess of pottage! He did not see the worth of the spiritual; did not value the unseen and the distant. He had no conception of the prize he was setting aside: no vision of the badness and folly of the bargain he was making. The birthright—he was glad to find that it could at least bring him a meal! To satisfy the cravings of his body for a little he bartered what should have been the abiding treasure of his soul. There was nothing sacred, nothing spiritual, in it. He treated it as a common thing which he could exchange for food. If Esau had become the inheritor of Isaac's

blessing, the true worship of God which had been kindled in Abraham would have been extinguished in Esau, because he does not seem to have shown any regard for religion whatever.

(2) Esau's profanity is further illustrated by another circumstance. Esau, we read, married two wives of the Hittites; and we read that this was a "grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah." Now there can be no doubt that Esau's Canaanitish marriages were in the eyes of his parents a religious offence; he was going out of the family to whom the promises were made: and though we may not be able entirely to enter into the feelings of the patriarchs, yet unquestionably, if Esau had been soberly and religiously minded, he would not have acted as he did. But the root of all was that his taste led him in a certain direction, and he had no higher spiritual principle within him to check and control that taste. And the feeling of mind which would lead Esau to despise the religious scruples, and probably the parental commands, of Isaac and Rebekah in the matter of his Canaanitish marriages is quite in keeping with that which led him to despise his birthright.

¶ If Morris had no use for a thing, whatever it might mean to others, for him it was something to be placed on one side. So on one side accordingly went religion, just as did the Art of the Renascence, or the scenic beauties of Southern Europe.[1]

IV.

The Sum.

To sum up: Esau's character shows how many good points a man may have without being religious, and the futility of all without religion. There is much that is very attractive in Esau's character. His open, impulsive nature, his frank, generous, forgiving spirit, seems far more engaging than the shrewd sobriety of Jacob. If he is a little vindictive, yet at least he has heavy wrongs to avenge, he makes no secret of his hostile intentions: and in the hour when he might have exacted vengeance, he gives instead his full and free forgiveness. He deliberately disobeys his father: but over his father's grave he returns to filial duty.

[1] A. Compton-Rickett, *William Morris*, 197.

Esau in daily life is a most attractive character; he is never preoccupied; his time is at your disposal; his thoughts are always vacant and open to the impressions of the moment, and that makes him always good company; he is the very ideal of the old French nobleman, "always charming, always gay."

1. He had none of those faults which attach themselves to timid and more thoughtful characters—the tendency to equivocate, and compass an end by somewhat doubtful means, to bargain, and *finesse*, and sail close to the wind. There was none of that irresolution about him which comes of over-calculation, and which so often robs an action of its force, and a kindness of its grace, nor any of that fear which tempts to untruthfulness. A lie was as repugnant to his mind as an act of cowardice. He had no idea of beating about the bush, or of reaching the goal by dint of stratagem. What he did he did openly, fearlessly, and in broad daylight. When he hated he hated without disguise, and when he loved it was with an equally open and unmistakable affection. A thoroughly natural man, a true son of the desert, restraint of every kind was intolerable to him, and he lived as if there were none.

In fact, we should say that he was a man possessing many natural virtues; and on account of this we should be inclined to think well of him, and perhaps to forget the other side of his character, or to set it down as of little importance when there was so much that impressed us favourably. And we should be the more inclined to think well of him from a sense of pity for the great and lasting injury he suffered at the hands of his brother. But the Word of God teaches us otherwise, and shows that the reverse side of his character outweighed, in the balance of God's judgment, the good that was in him. It is noticeable that he never names the Name of God. He never thinks of God at all. Even when he met his brother and forgave him, there was the prompting of a generous human heart, but there was apparently no religious feeling.

2. Esau's seems a miserable fate for one who had so many manly and noble qualities; but alas! it is the very curse of sin that it does degrade and pervert and destroy minds otherwise

noble. It breaks the one weak link in a chain that otherwise may be strong and sound. That life, it has been said, must be reprobate indeed, in which sin is the narrative, and not the episode. A few fine natural qualities, like the meteoric flashes of a stormy midnight, serve but to enhance the general darkness. This is the very moral of it: Esau sets his affections upon the earth, and therefore loses even that; selling his soul for the animal pleasures of this life, he gets less even of those than his meaner brother. And why? Because Jacob, with all the contemptible faults which lay on the surface of his character, had deep within his soul the faith, the faith in the Unseen, the sense of dependence on and love to God, which Esau did not even comprehend.

It is natural to pity Esau; but one has no right to do more. One has no right to fancy for a moment that God was arbitrary or hard upon him. Esau is not the sort of man to be the father of a great nation, or of anything else great. Greedy, passionate, reckless people like him, without due feeling of religion or of the unseen world, are not the men to govern the world, or help it forward, or be of use to mankind, or train up their families in justice and wisdom and piety. If there had been no people in the world but people like Esau, we should be savages at this day, without religion or civilization of any kind. They are of the earth, earthy; dust they are, and unto dust they will return. It is men like Jacob whom God chooses—men who have a feeling of religion and of the unseen world; men who can look forward, and live by faith, and form plans for the future, and carry them out too, against disappointment and difficulty, till they succeed.

¶ Life and character tend either upward or downward, but a single act or characteristic may not indicate the tendency of a life as a whole. You can make a saint out of the good qualities of bad men; you can make a devil out of the bad qualities of good men. Esau eclipsed Jacob at first, but his virtues were accidents, incidents, without roots, and they withered before the hot tests of life. Jacob outshone Esau at last. Day by day he fought his natural badness, and won in the hard struggle with himself. The mean supplanter Jacob became the hero Israel, a prince with God. Is it Thy will or my will be done? Are we living to please Christ or to please ourselves? Our answer to this question determines our life-current.[1]

[1] M. D. Babcock, *Thoughts for Every-Day Living*, 40.

¶ How God could have chosen such a man as Jacob for any special purpose of honour, to set him at the head of a nation, and give him a name above all kings, has puzzled many a reader. The lot has always fallen upon Esau, yet God chose Jacob for His special blessing. How is this? We can never find out, if we look at this case alone; but if we take a wide view of human history we shall discover that God has always chosen the weak and the lost as instruments of blessing in His wondrous ministry. He has never taken what would be generally considered the best specimens of humanity; He has often set the younger before the elder; He has left the ninety-and-nine sheep in the wilderness and gone after one that was lost; He has passed by Jerusalem, and set his love upon Nazareth; and when He elected a rock for His Church, it was not John, but Peter, to whom the revelation was made. All this is strange, and yet it is clearly God's method; and surely we may see the germ of the redemptive idea in this habit of working. If God had begun anywhere but at the very lowest depth, His work would have been incomplete; it would have been a kind of work which any man would have attempted; but to begin with the worst, to set Jacob above Esau, to prefer Peter to John, to select the bruised reed rather than the great, strong tree, was to adopt a method which never could have been conceived but by infinite wisdom and love.[1]

[1] Joseph Parker.

JOSEPH.

I.

The Dreamer.

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The Dreamer.

Behold, this dreamer cometh.—Gen. xxxvii. 20.

1. It was said by Coleridge that our greatest mission is to rescue admitted truths from the neglect caused by their universal admission. There is much force in this. When a truth is fighting for existence, it compels men, whether they love it or not, to consider it. But when its position is secured, it becomes like a well-used coin, or the familiar text which hangs unnoticed on the wall. It is a great mission to rescue such truths from neglect; to flash upon them the strong light which arrests attention; to play the part of Old Mortality, who, chisel in hand, was wont to clear the mould of neglect from the gravestones of the Covenanters, so that the legend might stand out clear-cut. It is something like this that we must attempt for the story of Joseph. We think we know all about it; and yet there may be depths of meaning and beauty which, by their very familiarity, escape us.

The life of Joseph is unquestionably one of the most thrilling chapters in the annals of Israel. The child reads it with wonder, and that wonder is not diminished, but rather increased, with advancing years, when its inward meaning is more fully realized. It is intensely human from beginning to end, and yet it is permeated through and through with the Divine. Distance in time tends to invest it with poetic glamour, so that we instinctively relegate it to the region of myth; but if we penetrate below the surface, we shall find that in its essential features it does not differ from the actualities of present-day experience. Throughout the ages the same hidden forces have been at work in human history, though time and place inevitably colour their visible manifestations. It is this that gives the achievements of heroes, the sufferings of martyrs, and the utterances of prophets such

absorbing interest, and makes them yield such weighty lessons to the reflecting mind.

2. Of the historicity of the tale there need be little doubt. The story was probably told again and again by Hebrew rhapsodists at the fireside of Hebrew homes, and a close critical examination of the text makes it probable that the writer of the Book of Genesis has worked into one, two, if not three, different strands. In one the caravan is said to be a caravan of Ishmaelites, in the other of Midianites; in the one Reuben plays the prominent part as trying to save Joseph, in the other Judah; and the exact length of time mentioned differs in different places. But in spite of such trivial discrepancies, the whole narrative is true to life. The changes of Joseph's fortunes are quite natural in Oriental countries; nothing happens to him which might not happen to a clever young Jew or Armenian in Constantinople to-day. No fairy godmother presides at his christening; no *deus ex machina* unties any knots; no Ariel is at hand to do his bidding; all moves forward within the lines of what is human and natural to an issue which justifies the ways of God to man. Indeed, it is quite extraordinary how Egyptology has shown the history to be consistent with the conditions of Egyptian life. Although no mention of Joseph has been found, yet there is scarcely a detail which cannot be illustrated from the literature and monuments of Egypt. The position which Joseph occupies in Potiphar's house; the temptation by Potiphar's wife; the position of the butler and the baker; the rise of a foreign slave to high political power; the granting of an amnesty on Pharaoh's birthday; the importance attached to dreams and their interpretation; the years of famine; the granaries in large cities; the golden collar put round Joseph's neck by Pharaoh; the new name given to him, the title "father to Pharaoh"; the oath "by the life of Pharaoh"; the concentration of landed property in the hands of the king and the priests; —these all find their exact counterpart.

¶ The supposition that it was under the Hyksos that Joseph was sold into Egypt, obtains stronger probability from the writings of Georgius Syncellus, who states that Joseph ruled the land in the reign of Apophis, whose age preceded the commencement of the Eighteenth Dynasty by only a few years. On the basis of an

old inscription at El-Kab, the author of which must have been a contemporary of Joseph, it is possible to establish the proof that Joseph and the Hyksos are inseparable from one another (1730 B.C.). It must be remembered that in the days of the patriarch a seven years' famine occurred, in consequence of a deficiency in the inundation. Although there is no royal cartouche in the tomb to which the inscription refers, there is internal evidence to show that Baba, its owner, must have lived immediately previous to the Eighteenth Dynasty. Baba, "the risen again," speaks thus: "I loved my father; I honoured my mother; my brothers and my sisters loved me. I went out of the door of my house with a benevolent heart; I stood there with refreshing hand; splendid were my preparations of what I collected for the festal day. Mild was (my) heart, free from violent anger. The gods bestowed upon me abundant prosperity on earth. The city wished me health and a life full of enjoyment. I punished the evil-doers. I collected corn, as a friend of the harvest god. I was watchful at the time of sowing. And when a famine arose, lasting many years, I distributed corn to the city each year of famine." Not the smallest doubt can be raised as to whether the last words of the inscription relate to an historical fact or not. However strongly we may be inclined to recognize a general way of speaking in the narrative of Ameni where "years of famine" are spoken of, just as strongly does the context of the present statement compel us to refer this record of "a famine lasting many years" to an epoch historically defined. Now, since famines succeeding one another are of the very greatest rarity in Egypt, and Baba lived and worked under the native king Seqenen-Ra Taa III. in the ancient city of El-Kab about the same time during which Joseph exercised his office under one of the Hyksos kings, there remains for a satisfactory conclusion but one fair inference: that the "many years of famine" in the days of Baba must correspond to the seven years of famine under Joseph's Pharaoh, who was one of the Shepherd Kings.[1]

I.

Joseph's Relation to his Brethren.

1. Joseph and his brethren were the children of different parents. Jacob was a polygamist, and his children were by different mothers, who, though living under the same roof, and

[1] Heinrich Brugsch-Bey, *Egypt under the Pharaohs*, 120.

thus compelled to maintain a semblance of harmony, must often have come into collision, through their over-anxiety to promote the interests of their own offspring. We cannot suppose that Jacob's family, any more than those of Abraham and Isaac, were exempt from the evils which polygamy is calculated to produce, not the least of which is morbid jealousy of each other, a passion which, when unrestrained, may lead to the foulest crimes. Let it be remembered that in those days there was no law against polygamy, and therefore in that act there was no sin; for, says the Apostle, "sin is not imputed where there is no law." And yet, we observe that, though this was no sin in Jacob, yet the penalty followed, for it was against the constitution of God's world.

¶ It is very hard for our nature to give away a share in affection where we were once supreme. There is a jealousy in these things that the most unselfish of us find it difficult to struggle with. Our right is gone, and we held it by favour. I can understand the feeling of wounded ambition through affection —the bitter sense of being displaced. Well, this would be very poor comfort for us if affection were like ambition. But what we have to try to do is to realize that they are not the same. A true heart, I am sure, never loves one less for taking in another; it is, in a way, all to every one. Surely true human love was intended to give us some idea of God's own, who is all that He can be to every one of us. Displacement or first and second are terms misapplied.[1]

2. In the one encampment of Jacob there were four divisions, forming not separate households, indeed, but yet far more dangerous, so far as the preservation of harmony was concerned, than if they had been entirely distinct. These were composed of Leah and her sons, Zilpah and her sons, Bilhah and her sons, and the sons of Rachel; and from what we learn elsewhere of Joseph's ten half-brothers, we may be sure that they had little scruple in riding roughshod over the feelings and wishes of any one who seemed in the least degree to stand in their way. This disposition of his brethren, added to his own motherless condition, would send Joseph much in upon himself, and make him, from his precocity in his experience of adversity, a welcome companion to his father.

[1] *Letters of John Ker*, 58.

¶ Joseph could not but come to think of his future and of his destiny in this family. That his father should make a pet of him rather than of Benjamin, he would refer to the circumstance that he was the oldest son of the wife of his choice, of her whom first he had loved, and who had no rival while he lived. To so charming a companion as Joseph must always have been, Jacob would naturally impart all the traditions and hopes of the family. In him he found a sympathetic and appreciative listener, who wiled him on to endless narrative, and whose imaginativeness quickened his own hopes and made the future seem grander and the world more wide. And what Jacob had to tell could fall into no kindlier soil than the opening mind of Joseph. No hint was lost, every promise was interpreted by some waiting aspiration. And thus, like every youth of capacity, he came to have his day-dreams. These day-dreams, though derided by those who cannot see the Cæsar in the careless trifler, and though often awkward and even offensive in their expression, are not always the mere discontented cravings of youthful vanity, but are frequently instinctive gropings towards the position which the nature is fitted to fill. "Our wishes," it has been said, "are the fore-feeling of our capabilities"; and certainly where there is any special gift or genius in a man, the wish of his youth is predictive of the attainment of manhood.[1]

3. Joseph was the favourite of his father. Little harm might have come of that if Jacob had not been unwise in the manifestation of his preference. One would think that the recollection of his own experience might have prevented him from falling into such a mistake. He might have asked himself how he had liked the favouritism of his father for Esau, or what good had come out of Rebekah's preference for himself above Esau. But, untaught by the consequences of the folly of his own parents, he repeated the same himself; for he seems in some sense to have set Joseph over the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah. No doubt Joseph was particularly wise for his years; for that, according to some, is the meaning of the phrase, "a son of the old ones," here translated "a son of old age"; but still, to put the younger over the older was pre-eminently foolish, and could only tend to provoke enmity in those who were thus humiliated. This feeling would be intensified by his giving to Joseph a peculiar dress which was intended to mark his superi-

[1] Marcus Dods.

ority. In our version it is called "a coat of many colours," as if its peculiarity consisted in its variegated appearance. But modern scholars are of opinion that the words describe "a tunic reaching to the extremities," or, as in the margin of the Revised Version, "a long garment with sleeves," and so refer to the shape rather than to the fabric; though from the fact that on one of the Egyptian tombs at Beni Hassan there is a representation of a train of captives who are clad in parti-coloured garments, it is not impossible that the tunic here specified was ornamented with many-coloured stripes. In any case it was meant as a badge of distinction and superiority for Joseph as the heir of the birthright and the favourite of his father, and so the very sight of it embittered the hearts of his brethren against him.

¶ He had twelve sons, and they had an equal need of his affection, and an equal claim to it; but ten of them were impoverished because a favourite son received more than his share. Jacob did not love Joseph too well; that was impossible. His fault did not consist in loving one of his sons more, but in loving the others less. "In the little world in which children live there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as an injustice. It may be only small injustice that the child is exposed to; but the child is small and its world is small." It was, no doubt, natural for Jacob to have a deep, fond love for Rachel's son, and to decide to make him his heir. Nor is it possible for a father to regard all his children with precisely the same kind of love. Some are brighter, more amiable, more companionable than others, and give him more joy. Some are unbelievers, and he regards them with a love of yearning pity, with a great deep longing for their salvation. Others are believers, and he regards them with a love of pure satisfaction and delight. But he must never cease to hold the balance evenly; and if he loves one at the expense of the others the results are inevitably evil. It has been finely said that "there is no friendship so intimate as that of a good father with a good child"; but if that intimacy implies a forgetfulness or neglect of other natural ties, both father and son are certain to find that nature does not forgive.[1]

4. The common view, indeed the almost universal view, regarding Jacob's preference for Joseph, is, that Joseph was as fully worthy of Jacob's love as he fully possessed it, and that his brethren's envy was altogether causeless. Probably, however,

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 89.

Joseph was at this time pretty much what would be called now a spoiled child; but he was a spoiled child with many fine qualities and great capabilities. What follows of his history seems a special design of Providence to undo the spoiling, and to bring out by adversity the noble character underneath. By the circumstances of his birth, from his earliest day both Rachel and Jacob doted upon him, and how could he escape spoiling? There are, indeed, two distinct flaws in Joseph's character at this period of his life.

(1) The youth so good and pure in other respects, descended to the office of a talebearer; behind his brothers' backs the tale was told; he who should have shielded their character from shame was the first to reveal their ill doings. He "brought unto his father their evil report." He is engaged in the very suspicious employment of family spy, carrying reports to his father against his brethren.

¶ I notice what you say in your letter about the sin of evil speaking. It is a sin very difficult indeed to deal with, but yet very dangerous to give way to. And it is apt, if not guarded against, to become quickly a habit, and then you commit it more easily and almost unconsciously. By all means strive and pray against such a sin. Not only does joining in it lower the general tone, but it injures your own soul.

There is nothing influences our own character more than the use of words. Nothing, for instance, so fosters a spirit of self-exaltation and mars our humility as a censorious way of speaking against others. It is because of this influence on character that our Blessed Lord says of our words, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Let it be your resolution at Christmas and the New Year to guard against and overcome this sin. I need not add how often such speaking leads us to be inconsiderate and unkind in our estimate of others. We think or speak against their weaknesses, forgetting that we, too, have our own weak points —that they have many excellences, perhaps, in which we are deficient.

Let the Spirit of Love rule in our hearts, which "thinketh no evil," which "hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things." The Spirit of Love, that is our Christmas lesson; "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."[1]

[1] J. P. F. Davidson, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 161.

(2) Matters were made still worse by his dreams. He told them with the utmost simplicity, but they carried their interpretation on their face, and the repetition of the same forecast, under different symbolism, intensified the provocation. He must have foreseen that the telling of the dreams could only excite their hostility the more, so there seems to have been a half-wilful gratuitous annoyance of his brethren on the calculation that he could screen himself from their anger behind his father's partiality. His brethren were in no mood to do obeisance to him, and even his father, though he resolved to keep watch and see if God had really been revealing the future to his son, blamed him for what seemed to be his pride. It is not said in the record that his dreams were prophetic, and some have preferred to believe that they came like any ordinary visions, taking their shape from the general current of Joseph's thoughts when he was awake. That is not an impossibility, but it may be nearer the mark to say that they came in the way of Divine revelation, and were among the early links in that chain of providences which ultimately led the family of Jacob to Egypt, where they could better grow into a nation than they could among the Canaanites. But, however, that may have been, the very telling of them inflamed the hatred of his brethren against him, and moved them to take measures to put him out of the way.

¶ One morning, soon after the turn towards the improvement had been reached, he told me of a dream from which he had just awakened. As he told it to me in the half-darkened room, the voice enfeebled by illness, I, afraid of forgetting it, tried to write it down word for word, and it was this: "I thought," he said, "that I was climbing up the side of a steep mountain, and I knew that it was the mountain of Fame—Fame in the greatest sense of the word, all that is worthy of the best endeavour. It was so steep that I had to cut each step that I took, and I knew as I went on that the path I made closed up behind me, so that no one could follow where I went; and I could not find the track of any one who had gone before me. From the foot of the hill I had seen quite clearly the paths made by other men—some rough, some smooth; but when I began myself to climb, I could not see them at all; they were all hidden under tangles of thorns and briars.

"While I was still labouring on, making my path, I was

suddenly lifted up and allowed for a few minutes to be on the very top of the mountain, so that I could see the whole distance laid out before me. It was more ethereal than I can describe, of a beauty that can only be imagined in a dream. I was looking over a sort of parapet, and there were pillars of some building beside me; and, though I heard voices, I could not lose one moment of the beauty by turning to see who spoke; but I was aware somehow that these people had reached the summit, and were to remain there for ever, themselves a part of that great beauty, giving out to it from their own being. And I said to myself, this is the sort of fame for which I have given my life.

"I hope," he added, "I shall be able to keep that vision before me; I think I shall, now I have told you."[1]

So I from all things bright and brave,
Select what brightest, bravest seems,
And, with the utmost skill I have,
Contrive the fashion of my dreams.

Sometimes ambitious thoughts abound,
And then I draw my pattern bold,
And have my shuttle only wound
With silken threads or threads of gold.

Sometimes my heart reproaches me,
And mesh from cunning mesh I pull,
And weave in sad humility
With flaxen threads or threads of wool.

For here the hue too brightly gleams,
And there the grain too dark is cast,
And so no dream of all my dreams
Is ever finished, first or last.

And looking back upon my past
Thronged with so many a wasted hour,
I think that I should fear to cast
My fortunes if I had the power.

And think that he is mainly wise,
Who takes what comes of good or ill,
Trusting that wisdom underlies
And worketh in the end—His will.[2]

[1] *George Frederick Watts*, ii. 142.

[2] Alice Cary.

II.

The Result.

1. The view which has been taken of Joseph's early life strips him of the full admiration that he generally receives, and attaches to him somewhat of rebuke. But though partially blaming Joseph, it is not necessary in consequence of this that we should reverse the whole scene and set about excusing his brethren. Not only is that not necessary—it is not possible. When he was coming to them in Dothan on a message from his father, their ridicule, if not gratuitous, was at all events excessive. It was too severe—"Behold, this dreamer cometh." And their immediately following conspiracy against his life so far outwent any slight offence he had given them that it was monstrous and horrible. They were not guided by the precept—"Be ye angry, and sin not."

¶ Revenge is sweet! I am afraid that some of us like just a little revenge; not that we should ourselves personally and directly inflict it, but if our enemies could, somehow or another, be tripped up, and tumble half-way at least into a pit, we should not feel that compunction and sorrow and distress of soul which, sentimentally, appears to be so very fine and beautiful. Nothing but God the Holy Ghost can train a man to this greatness of answering the memory of injury with tears, and accepting processes in which only men appear to have a part, as if God, after all, had been over-ruling and directing the whole scheme.[1]

2. Reuben's interposition was blessed of God to save the intended victim, and forms the first link of a wonderful chain of providences. When Joseph was cast into the pit to be left to his fate, Reuben designed to return, extricate him, and restore him to his father. But the rescue was a more circuitous one, permitted to begin as miserably as possible that it might end as gloriously as possible. There appeared in sight a company of merchants travelling to Egypt with laden camels, and their appearance was suggestive to Judah. "What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content." Thus

[1] Joseph Parker.

envy, hatred, and twenty pieces of silver make Joseph a slave, and rob Jacob of his favourite, the son of his old age.

¶ Keep yourselves far from envy; because it eateth up and taketh away good actions, like as fire eateth up and burneth wood.[1]

¶ To a certain extent jealousy is just and reasonable, since it only aims at preserving a real or fancied possession, while envy is a madness and cannot endure the welfare of others.[2]

¶ Hate is a bad spirit to face the world with, my boy. Hatred is heavier freight for the shipper than it is for the consignee.[3]

3. Reuben was not present when the sale was made. On his return he "rent his clothes" in impotent mourning. But the others dipped Joseph's princely raiment in the blood of a kid, to give their father the impression that Joseph had been "devoured by a wild beast." The device succeeded. Jacob mourned him bitterly and "for many days," refusing all the comfort which his family hypocritically offered. But even his bitterest lamentation expressed the hope and faith that he would meet his loved son in another world—for he said: "I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning."

¶ There is a large and secret brotherhood in this world, the members of which easily recognize each other, without any visible outward sign. It is the band of mourners. The members of this brotherhood need not necessarily wear mourning; they can even rejoice with the joyful, and they seldom sigh or weep when others see them. But they recognize and understand each other without uttering a word. Their countenances reflect a soft moonlight; when they speak, one thinks of the whispering of the leaves of a beech forest after a warm spring shower, and as the rays of the sun light up the drops of dew with a thousand colours, and drink them up from the green grass, a heavenly light seems to shine through the tears of the mourners, to lighten them, and lovingly kiss them away. Almost every one, sooner or later, enters this brotherhood, and those who enter it early may be considered fortunate, for they learn, before it is too late, that *all* which man calls his own is only lent him for a short time, and

[1] *The Sayings of Muhammad* (ed. Al-Suhrawardy), 82.
[2] Rochefoucauld, *Maxims.*
[3] Augustus Thomas, *The Witching Hour.*

the ivy of their affections does not cling so deeply and so strongly to the old walls of earthly happiness.[1]

O bitter wind toward the sunset blowing,
What of the dales to-night?
In yonder gray old hall what fires are glowing?
What ring of festal light?

"In the great window as the day was dwindling
I saw an old man stand;
His head was proudly held and his eyes kindling,
But the list shook in his hand."

O wind of twilight, was there no word uttered,
No sound of joy or wail?
"'A great fight and a good death,' he muttered;
'Trust him, he would not fail.'"

What of the chamber dark where she was lying
For whom all life is done?
"Within her heart she rocks a dead child, crying
'My son, my little son.'"[2]

[1] Max Müller. [2] H. Newbolt, *Poems New and Old*, 87.

JOSEPH.

II.

The Prisoner and Prime Minister.

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The Prisoner and Prime Minister.

And Joseph found grace in Potiphar's sight, and he ministered unto him: and he made him overseer over all his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.—Gen. xxxix. 4.

There is none greater in this house than I.—Gen. xxxix. 9.

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, . . . Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.—Gen. xli. 40, 41.

Except by an incidental reference to it in the later confession of his brothers, we are not told either of the tears or the entreaties with which Joseph vainly sought to move his brethren, or of his journey into Egypt. We know that when following in the caravan of his new masters, he must have seen at a distance the heights of his own Hebron, where, all unsuspecting, his father awaited the return of his favourite. To that home he was never again to return. We meet him next in the slave-market. Here, as it might seem in the natural course of events, "Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hand of the Ishmaelites." He would be carried into that part of Egypt which was always most connected with Palestine.

I.

In Potiphar's House.

1. Joseph's conduct at this period of his life was the first step towards the greatness that awaited him. It showed the healthiness and wholesomeness of his nature that he passed through the galling and trying experiences of his humiliation unhurt. He was not soured towards men. He did not grow morbid, sullen, or dis-

heartened. Though a slave, he accepted his position with cheerfulness, and entered heartily into his new life, doing his duties so well that he soon became overseer in his master's house. He did not grieve over his wrongs, or exhaust himself in self-pity—one of the most miserable and unmanly of emotions. He did not burn out the love of his heart in vindictive and resentful feelings. He did not brood over his wrongs. He looked forward and not back, out and not in. The darkness about Joseph's life was not allowed to enter his heart. This was one of the great secrets of his victorious living. The light within him continued to burn pure and clear. With hatred all about him, he kept love in his heart. Enduring injuries, wrongs, and injustice, his spirit was forgiving. With a thousand things that tended to discourage and dishearten him, to break his spirit, he refused to be discouraged. Because other men lived unworthily was but a stronger reason why he should live worthily. Because he was treated cruelly and wickedly was fresh reason why he should give to others about him the best service of love and unselfishness. That his condition was hard was to him a new motive for living heroically and nobly. So we find the spirit of Joseph unbroken under all that was galling and crushing in his circumstances.

¶ Sometimes all that we can do is to stand still and bear, and go on bearing as best we can, sure that it all comes from God's hand and so must be good for us—good for the whole of His creatures, somehow, that we should bear it all for the sake of the Lord, who bore the cross and shame, and the weight of our sins.[1]

2. We read that Joseph bore himself so genially, and did his work so well, and was so capable, so true, so trustworthy, that Potiphar left all he had in his hand; "he knew not aught that was with him, save the bread which he did eat." Joseph would never have won such a success if he had spent his time in vain regrets or in vindictive feelings. We should learn the lesson, and it is worth learning—it is life's highest and best lesson. It is the victory of the faith in Christ which overcometh the world.

¶ If he was to be a slave, Joseph was determined he would be the best of slaves, and what he was required to do he would do with his might and with his heart. This is a most important

[1] *Life of W. E. Collins, Bishop of Gibraltar*, 51.

consideration, and it may, perhaps, help to explain why similar trials have had such different results in different persons. One has been bemoaning that it is not with him as it used to be, while the other has discovered that some talents have been still left him, and he has set to work with these. One has been saying, "If I had only the resources which I once possessed I could do something; but now they have gone, I am helpless." But the other has been soliloquizing thus: "If I can do nothing else I can at least do this, little as it is; and if I put it into the hand of Christ, He can make it great"; and so we account for the unhappiness and uselessness of the one, and for the happiness and usefulness of the other. Nor will it do to say that this difference is a mere thing of temperament. It is a thing of character. The one acts in faith, recognizing God's hand in his affliction; the other acts in unbelief, seeing nothing but his own calamity, and that only increases his affliction. So we come to this: keep fast hold of God's hand in your captivity, and do your best in that which is open to you. That will ultimately bring you out of it; but if you lose that you will lose everything.[1]

¶ I have been led in a way that I knew not. Loving-kindness has followed me all the days of my life. I can see the good hand of God in many of the most bewildering and painful events of my history; and just as, when the sun has set, the stars come out in their placid beauty, and "darkness shows us worlds of light we never saw by day," so, in the darkness of depression, public slander, and personal suffering, I have learnt more lessons for good, and been more braced up for earnest work, than by ought or all besides.[2]

¶ How much nobler is Jacob's confession of dependence, and his recognition of the guiding hand of God, than the modern poet's boast:—

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbow'd.

[1] W. M. Taylor, *Joseph, the Prime Minister*, 47.
[2] W. Morley Punshon, in *Life* by F. W. Macdonald, 84.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
  Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
  Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
  How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
  I am the captain of my soul.[1]

II.

Temptation.

1. We can hardly imagine a position more terribly difficult than that of Joseph. His master's wife shared in the general admiration which his bearing had inspired, and was, in addition, infatuated by his comely form and youthful vigour. Carried away by wanton impulse, she eagerly besought him to gratify her passion.

(1) Now Joseph was not a glorified spirit. He was a young mortal man, subject to "like passions such as we are." The fiery arrows of the words, actions, looks, of the temptress were aimed upon no statue, no automaton, but upon a being full of the perils of our nature in its glowing prime. Not only so: this young man, this young Oriental man, was placed in circumstances exquisitely difficult for virtue and terribly easy for moral relaxation. Outwardly, there was no call upon him such as the words *noblesse oblige* imply; he was but a purchased slave. And he was in a country—namely, Egypt—which was infected to an extreme degree by moral pollution; he had breathed for years the air of its opinion and practice everywhere around him. His home in Canaan had been no perfect home, yet the breath of the Lord and the Promise had been in it. But now here he was, a young man, away from home, helplessly separated from all its aids, including the moral influence of a father who had "seen God face to face," imperfect as his use of that blessing had often been. Moreover, Joseph had been carried off from home by an act of atrocious injustice and cruelty, enough to embitter his spirit for all time.

[1] W. E. Henley.

(2) Joseph might have pleaded that the consequences of his sin would be favour and advancement, while the consequences of his resistance would be, in all likelihood, irretrievable disgrace. It oftens happens, in this strange life of ours, that men seem to succeed and to obtain the respect of their fellows by means of the very qualities and actions which ought, one would think, to make all men despise them. Provided a man has reached eminence, the world does not inquire too closely what sort of contemptible ladder he may have used. Joseph, by yielding to temptation, would have found favour in the eyes of Potiphar's wife, and we may take it for granted that she would have let no harm come to him from Potiphar. To sin seemed by far the easiest way out of the difficulty.

¶ In that far-gone period when Joseph lived, moral restraint was much weaker than it is to-day, and the mere pagan joy of life proportionately stronger. Consider what it meant for such a youth to be suddenly introduced to the corrupting and luxurious life of Egypt. From the simple patriarchal life of the plains he was violently separated by a series of bitter vicissitudes. He was a peasant of genius, suddenly made a citizen of a complex civilization; and such an instance as that of Robert Burns may serve to remind us of the grave perils of the position. If he had ever sighed for a larger life than that of the agriculturist and cattle breeder, now he had it. If he ever felt his veins athirst for the pleasures of life, now that thirst might be easily gratified. He was among a people who loved pleasure, and who knew little of sin. The standards by which they measured life were wholly different from those to which he had been accustomed. Probably there was not one among his acquaintances who would not have laughed at his scruples, and have jeeringly told him to do in Egypt as Egypt did.[1]

2. Let us now consider the way in which Joseph, instead of yielding to the pressure of these circumstances, met and overcame the temptation which assailed him. He did not allow his youth, or his distance from home, or the possible consequences, to blind him to the true nature of the proposal which was made to him, did not beat about the bush and endeavour to sophisticate himself into the belief that wrong was right, did not try to mitigate the evil by talking about sin as if it were merely folly, or a pardonable

[1] W. J. Dawson, *The Divine Challenge*, 234.

indiscretion. How then did he fortify himself against the enticement of evil?

(1) *Joseph resisted temptation by calling things by their right name.*—There is a vast difference between the ways in which temptation is resisted. Some, knowing the thing desired of them to be essentially wrong, have recourse to cowardly shifts and evasions. They are unable to comply: thus much they will answer; but for this inability they will render all sorts of secondary and insufficient reasons, and keep back the right one. They will represent that they are precluded from compliance by some promise, or some engagement at the time proposed; or will put forward considerations of thriftiness, or want of inclination, or in fact any reason to mask the true one, of which they are ashamed. How very different from this weak and ineffectual course is the refusal of one who fearlessly states at once the right and master-reason why he should not yield to temptation: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

¶ There is no more mischievous maxim than that which finds expression in the saying of Burke: "Vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness." It is when "Satan is transformed into an angel of light" that his power is most deadly. He who has learnt to call the sin to which he is tempted "this great wickedness" has already won half the battle.[1]

¶ Sin is a dreadful, positive, malignant thing. What the world in its worst part needs is not to be developed, but to be destroyed. Any other talk about it is shallow and mischievous folly. The only question is about the best method and means of destruction. Let the sharp surgeon's knife do its terrible work, let it cut deep and separate as well and thoroughly as it can, the false from the true, the corrupt from the uncorrupt; it can never dissect away the very principle of corruption which is in the substance of the blood itself. Nothing but a new reinforcement of health can accomplish that.[2]

¶ There was a profound meaning in the comment on Socrates which Matthew Arnold puts into the mouth of Carlyle, that he was too much at ease in Sion. A man who knows the world cannot be wholly at ease; he may have a deep repose of spirit, but he sees about him that with which he must wage relentless war.

[1] F. R. Bailey. [2] *Phillips Brooks*, by J. Gregory, 110.

Repose we may possess even in the most arduous toil; ease we can never have while we are surrounded by conditions which are hostile to our highest life. For this reason Dante, notwithstanding a certain narrowness of temper, impresses the world as an essentially higher nature than Goethe, notwithstanding the immense breadth and productivity of the great German. Dante was not, it is possible, a wholly stainless man, but he came to see sin with a clearness which no other human soul has surpassed, and to hate it with all the intensity of his passionate soul. The "Divine Comedy" is very far removed from us in its forms and phrases, but the deepest impression we get from it is the impression of reality. Under the terrible light which Dante holds aloft in the *Inferno*, sin is no matter of imperfect development; it is an appalling and loathsome reality. Its hideousness becomes concrete in a thousand repulsive forms and, its disguises all sternly stripped from it, we see its naked deformity and realize how corrupting and unspeakably degrading it is. The insight of the great artists, even when divorced from or indifferent to the moral aspects of life, has detected the secret nature of sin quite as unerringly as the insight of the men of spiritual genius. The drama, from the earliest to the latest times, abounds in expositions of its inherent corrupting and destructive power, overwhelming in their impressiveness. From the days of Æschylus to those in which Browning wrote "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," the dramatist has told again and again, in every conceivable form, the tragedy of the transgressor. The penetrating genius of Hawthorne was continually searching the mystery, studying it from the side of inheritance, of personal responsibility and its reactive influence, and dealing with it always with a sincerity and subtlety which bore constant witness to the directness and authority of the vision brought to bear on some of the most terrible and elusive facts of human experience. In fact, fiction in its higher form bears constant witness to the presence and reality of sin amongst men. Flaubert's masterpiece is, in its way, one of the most searching pieces of moral analysis ever made, and no one can read *Madame Bovary* without feeling the merciless accuracy with which the successive stages of moral disintegration are traced. In like manner, Zola has made the most appalling disclosure of the ravages of intemperance in *L'Assommoir*. Such pictures as these, even when painted with repulsive frankness and in a cynical temper, bear unimpeachable testimony to the horror of sin even in the vision of the artist indifferent to definite teaching and intent only on seeing things as they are.[1]

[1] H. W. Mabie, *The Life of the Spirit*, 21.

(2) *Joseph recognized that his sin would be a sin against God.*—"How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" At once we recognize the presence of the Holy God in this scene. He is its light and glory, its power and victory. God the Holy fills the entire field of vision, and Joseph is strengthened with might in the inner man by an all-pervading awe of Him. His heart throbs with a vehement solicitude not to offend God, not to violate His will or in the slightest particular displease Him. That is the fire which burns with such scorching heat in these words. That is the flame which leaps up in his heart in cleansing force. That is the source of the mighty passion by which in a moment, and at one throw, he flings far behind him the corrupting bait of the temptress. It is not hatred of the woman, though that might have been excused. It is not anxiety for his own reputation first and foremost, though that is not without its influence. It is not even solicitude, before all things, to maintain his integrity in his trust as the steward of Potiphar, though that too operates with great and decisive energy; it is the recognition of God. He cannot sin against Him. There is the impassable barrier. That Sacred Presence for ever blocks the way. This Authority ruling in and for righteousness utterly shuts out all possibility of yielding, and constrains the tempted man to escape, at lightning speed, from the neighbourhood of danger.

¶ All sin is sin against God. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," said David in his penitence. Cruelty to an animal is sin against God. Treachery to Potiphar was sin against God. All our acts have reference to God. Sins against innocence and purity are sins against God. We can never get away from our relation to God in any act of our life. In all such temptations as this of Joseph's, men should remember that, while to yield would be treason to another, it would also be sin against God.[1]

III.

In Prison.

1. Wrong has now reached its extremity when we behold Joseph an imprisoned slave—incarcerated for the noblest deed of

[1] J. R. Miller.

his life. But even in such a place and under such an imputation he does not give way to despondency, but finds scope for his holy principles, therein presenting the world with a fine proof of the adaptation of godliness to all circumstances and changes. Just as before Joseph's conduct as a slave had approved itself to his master, so now his conduct as a prisoner approves itself to his keeper. He is an epistle of God known and read of all men. Both men discerned that he was a man who truly feared God, and who was specially favoured by Him whom he feared. Joseph's integrity and God-fearingness take a firmer hold on the mind of the keeper of the prison than on that of the captain of the guard. Potiphar trusted his goods, but the jailer his life, his life being at stake for the prisoners' safe-keeping. He "committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand, because the Lord was with him; and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper."

¶ A case was on trial in a Kentucky court-room. An old man of somewhat shabby appearance had just given important testimony; and the lawyer, whose cause suffered by his statements, strove in every way to confuse and trip him, but in vain. The witness stuck to his story, and did not lose his temper, in spite of the irritating manner in which the cross-examination was conducted. Finally, in the hope of breaking down the credibility of the witness, the lawyer at a venture asked, "Have you ever been in prison?"

"I have," replied the witness.

"Ah!" exclaimed the attorney, with a triumphant glance at the jury, "I thought as much. May I inquire how long you were there?"

"Two years and three months," answered the witness, quietly, with a manner that was interpreted by the lawyer as indicating chagrin at an unexpected exposure.

"Indeed," said the delighted lawyer, feeling his case already won, "that was a heavy sentence. I trust the jury will note the significance of the fact. Now, sir, tell the jury where you were confined."

"In Andersonville," replied the old man, drawing himself up proudly.

There was a moment of silence. The jurors looked at each other; and then the court-room rang with cheers which the court

officers were powerless to check, and in which some of the jury joined. It is scarcely necessary to add that that lawyer lost his verdict. Joseph's prison experience was as honourable as that.[1]

2. The same preserving power is now in the Egyptian prison as later in the Babylonian furnace. The same power of conviction is more quietly exercised in that prison by Joseph, as afterwards more stirringly by Paul and Silas in the prison of Philippi. Higher likeness still—Joseph is a type of his Lord; for what Christ accomplished in a spiritual and heavenly sense, Joseph does in a moral and terrestrial one—his career in prison being virtually a leading of captivity captive.

¶ Just as a man can often do more by his sorrow than by his anger, so the Cross of Christ has reached many whom the terrors of judgment could never have reached, has brought them home like prodigal sons returning to a Father; has brought them to repentance instead of remorse, and to loving submission instead of despair. The Cross of Christ is indeed the one unapproachable source of all spiritual healing; but yet the Cross, like all else in the economy of God's government, does not stand alone, but has its types and shadows, its copies and counterparts, scattered through God's works; and these, while they are resemblances of its character, are also channels of its power. The saints whom God hath sent, and, as we know, will continue to send, for the edification of His Church, can do their appointed work chiefly by bearing the Cross which Christ once bore; the cross of living purely in a world of sin; of being just and true and loving in a world of iniquity and falsehood and hatred; of suffering, when need requires it, for the sake of truth; of sacrificing all else at the call of duty for the love of God; of caring, beyond all other things, for God's service and God's glory, and kindling, where they can, the same desire in the hearts of others. And even those who know full well that they have no title to be saints, yet, if they will be God's children at all, must expect to bear the same cross; must expect to give up their own will, even when innocent, for Christ's sake; must count on meeting with burdens and trials which do not seem to belong to them; must be ready not to complain, but rather to rejoice that God thus gives them tokens of claiming them for His own.[2]

[1] L. A. Banks, *The Great Saints of the Bible*, 82.
[2] Archbishop Temple.

IV.

Prime Minister.

A single day brought Joseph into a totally new position. From being a prisoner in the king's gaol he was suddenly summoned to appear before the great Pharaoh. He found the king in much distress from the pressure of two supernatural dreams, which he could not banish from his mind, and which the magi of Egypt could not explain. The restored butler of Pharaoh had prepared the way for the request that Joseph should become interpreter; and he, protesting that his secret could be revealed only by God, undertook to tell Pharaoh the signification of his dreams. The result was, that the despotic monarch at once elevated Joseph to the highest post in the kingdom next to the throne, and put at his disposal unlimited power to carry out whatever measures he thought best for the welfare of the kingdom. Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh armed with full authority to inaugurate those far-reaching and wise arrangements by which the coming years of famine were to be provided for. In this work three things were conspicuous, though the details of them are not given.

1. It was the principle of *economy* upon which Joseph wrought. The way to provide for the future is to economize in the present, for the waste of plentiful years brings want in years of famine. It is the waste of our abundance that breeds want and poverty. When there is much, we should learn to lay by in store that which is not wanted for present need. This is a very hard lesson to learn. We are all naturally extravagant and wasteful, spending that which we should save, and wasting that which should be laid up in store. Joseph demonstrated that, properly managed, the produce of the earth is sufficient to supply the needs of all men, taking years of plenty and years of scarcity together. God means us to learn how to manage our substance so that in years of plenty there shall be no waste in order that in years of famine there be no lack.

2. Another point which strikes us is Joseph's *industry*. It must have required a vast amount of careful industry to arrange

for the housing of the surplus corn of those seven plentiful years. Houses had to be built. Contracts had to be made. Transportation had to be provided. We doubt not that much authority had to be exercised in compelling the farmers to sell their wheat and cultivate all available land. The perfect success of his plans demonstrates that every detail had been carefully thought out. During all these seven years, so fully occupied was Joseph that he had scarcely time to think of his old home, of his beloved father, or his faithless brothers, although we may be sure that he did not forget them altogether.

3. Joseph showed great *patience* in his difficult undertaking. He was carrying on all these toilsome works solely upon the authority of the conviction of the truth of his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. Seven years was a long time to hold fast by a purpose, especially when there was no outward sign of need. But Joseph had learned to wait. Had he not waited thirteen years already for his dreams to begin to be fulfilled? Surely he knew how to wait patiently for other seven years. The people, blinded by their present prosperity, must have thought of him as a visionary dreamer. Well, he had borne that taunt before. Still, it is hard to persevere in the face of unbelief, especially when one's patience is taxed for years upon years. But Joseph lived to see his patience and faith rewarded.

¶ Dr. Gordon's patience was, from a psychological point of view, marvellous. Such constant intrusions, such various and frequent interruptions, such unremitting labour, such continuous expenditure of vitality, would have kept most men in a chronic condition of nervous irritability. Yet no one ever reported a single outbreak of petulance, a single expression of impatience, in his whole career. His heart kept a "high, calm, spheric frame," undisturbed by the exasperating incidents which beset every one who has to deal largely with the helpless, the broken and the weak.[1]

¶ Plodding, common-place workman though Patience seem, hers is a work that, will we let it, comes to a wonder of perfection. There is an air about things her hand has been on that is as unmistakable as it is indescribable. Not to sudden and bold strokes does the marble owe its utmost perfectness. No, but to the silent, oft-repeated passages of the chisel over the stone, little

[1] E. B. Gordon, *A. J. Gordon: A Biography*, 188.

more than audible in the occurrence, almost imperceptible in the separate result—it is these that leave the statue a marvel and a desire. Let us "run with patience."[1]

> Patience! why, 'tis the soul of peace:
> Of all the virtues, 'tis nearest kin to heaven:
> It makes men look like gods. The best of men
> That e'er wore earth about Him was a sufferer;
> A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit;
> The first true gentleman that ever breathed.[2]

[1] R. W. Barbour, *Thoughts*, 40. [2] Thomas Dekker.

JOSEPH.

III.

The Saviour of His People.

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The Saviour of his People.

And God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance.—Gen. xlv. 7.

By faith Joseph, when his end was nigh, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel.—Heb. xi. 22.

The slave of Potiphar, the long imprisoned, has become the first subject in Egypt. He had suffered wrong and reproach repeatedly at men's hands, but recompense and vindication have come at length from heaven. The despised dreams of youth are now virtually fulfilled. The sheaves of his brethren have not yet actually fallen down before his sheaf, nor the sun, moon, and eleven stars yet done actual obeisance to him; but all is now ready for a consummation, the actual event of which falls into the third portion into which we have divided Joseph's history.

The distressing effects of the famine, felt so keenly in Egypt, had extended even to the land of Canaan; and Jacob's family were sorely pressed with need. Hearing of the treasured corn in Egypt, the old man directed his sons to proceed at once to that favoured nation, and provide a supply of food. With the exception of Benjamin, who to Jacob was the only surviving son of Rachel the beloved, the brothers went their way. Before long they reached their destination in safety, and were ushered into Joseph's presence.

I.

Joseph and his Brethren.

1. Although Joseph knew his brethren when he saw them, they did not know him. This is not surprising. The years had passed over him between youth and manhood, and the coat

of many colours was exchanged for the dignified dress and appointments of a great prince of Egypt. There was less alteration in them. They were already men when Joseph had seen them last, and the lapse of a little over twenty years may have slackened the activity of their step and furrowed the lines on their cheeks, but it had not carried the oldest of them beyond the vigour of life. The brethren of Joseph were strong men when they sold him into Egypt, and the brethren of Joseph were still strong men—older, but not old—when they bowed before him with their faces to the earth, as the first minister of the Egyptian Crown. In addition to all this, it would excite no wonder in Joseph to see his brethren there. Considering that the famine was spread over all the countries round, Canaan among them, it might rather be expected that the sons of Israel should be among those who came to buy corn. Their presence before the storehouses of Egypt was natural; but that the boy whom they sold those years ago for twenty pieces of silver should be supreme ruler under the sovereign of the proud kingdom of Egypt, this was so completely past the wildest reach of imagination that we do not wonder at their failing to know him; putting aside the disguises of dress, we should have wondered rather if they had known him. It was under the shelter, then, of this concealment that Joseph took the line of action which we are now going to observe.

2. Joseph's treatment of his brethren was one of the puzzles of our childhood; and some of us, perhaps, stumble over it still, especially over the pain which he caused to his favourite brother, Benjamin. The key to his whole method is that he was trying to find out whether they would behave in the same fashion as they had done before, and to prove to them, as well as to himself, that they would not.

Joseph was indeed saving his brothers alive by a great deliverance. He was providing against the immediate destruction with which the famine was threatening them; he was providing against the more thorough and permanent destruction which their own selfishness and crimes were working out. He understood this to be the purpose of God in His ways to them.

(1) *The remembrance of the past.*—Joseph tries them—puts them to the proof. Will they do the same thing as they had done

before, or are they different men? So he demands their younger brother, and the demand brings back the remembrance of Joseph; they are certain that their father would look upon Benjamin's going with them as though he were losing Joseph a second time. How will they behave? Are they the same reckless, unfeeling men who sold Joseph? Or have the searchings of heart—the times of remorse which they must have experienced—had any effect on them? And then Joseph increased the mystery and the fear by taking Simeon and putting him in prison. Doubtless Simeon's voice had been loudest for murder in the old days. They felt the strange mystery of his selection. Then, again, the money found in their sacks increased their sense of mystery; they go home with failing hearts, saying, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" And after that came the meeting with Jacob without one son; and, worse still, the having to demand Benjamin from him. When Reuben cries, "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee," he has to feel, in his turn, his father's old sorrow, and to make the bitter discovery that he is not trusted, that his father has never forgotten his old unfaithfulness. So everything —Joseph's demand for Benjamin, their father's grief and reproaches —concurs to call up the old, sad scene; they see it acted over again as in a parable. At last the famine presses, and they set out again full of fear—fear of the old sin that seems coming back so vividly upon them; fear at having Benjamin with them; fear of meeting that stern ruler who had put Simeon in prison; fear about the questions he might ask concerning the money returned in their sacks. And this fear increased, their sense of some mysterious dealing with them grew, when they were invited to the palace of the great unknown prince, and found themselves, by the same secret knowledge that took Simeon, set in order according to their age, as if God Himself were sorting them. Then came the terrible agony as they saw the cup taken from Benjamin's sack, and heard the judgment which took him so hopelessly from them. As they had done to Joseph and their father, so had this strange, mysterious doom done to Benjamin and themselves. Did they now envy Benjamin—their father's favourite—as they had envied Joseph twenty years before? Were they ready to go back with another heart-breaking story to Jacob—a story this time only too true? The whole crime was being acted out over again

before their eyes; the whole circumstances were being called to life again, except that they had not so far risen against their favoured brother.

(2) *The reversal of the past.*—There is no disposition on their part to disconnect their fortunes from his, to make selfish conditions of safety for themselves. They accept his offence as their own, his iniquity as the iniquity of them all. One fate, one lot for all; or, if a better doom for any, let that be for him. Great as his fault has been, deep as the danger and disgrace into which he has brought them, they will not desert him, and by this desertion obtain, as is plain they may do, a selfish deliverance for themselves. Their trial reaches its crisis when Joseph announces to them that Benjamin shall remain his servant, but that they all are free to return home. Judah is the spokesman in reply. Rejecting Joseph's suggestion, he makes, in the nobleness of self-offering love, another proposition. Stepping nearer in the passionate earnestness of the moment, he speaks out boldly, yet not at the same time forgetting for an instant that it is Egypt's lord with whom he speaks. This speech of Judah's has hardly obtained the admiration which it deserves. It is a noble model of the eloquence which sometimes visits men not eloquent by nature, when a great occasion has loosed their tongues. Briefly recapitulating what had passed since first he and his brethren came to Egypt, he puts back the temptation with which Joseph has tempted him and his brethren. Without Benjamin he will not return home. The life of his father is bound up with the life of the lad; only let the lad return with his brethren, and he will remain, a bondman in his stead. This was enough for Joseph; this was all he wanted. The brethren that could thus speak and act were not the same that had sat down in Dothan to eat bread, while he, their brother, was lying in the pit; they were not the same that had brought his raiment dipped in blood to their father. There was nothing to hinder him now from declaring himself to them.

(3) *The forgiveness of the past.*—"Joseph made himself known unto his brethren." Judah's appeal was overwhelming in its effect upon his brother. Joseph could restrain himself no longer. The heart's love refused to be kept back longer, and in spite of himself, the tenderness he had sought to hide beneath a harsh

and cruel exterior burst from him, and made its presence felt. "I am Joseph" was his simple confession. It is impossible for us to conceive the effect of this revelation upon those men. For the moment they must have been utterly staggered, confounded, amazed. Remembering their cruelty to him, the dastardly wrong he had suffered at their hands; and seeing him before them the governor of a mighty nation, binding its princes at his pleasure, and teaching its senators wisdom, we can well understand how terror and remorse would so paralyse their heart as to leave them speechless in misery. They "could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." It was thus he poured balm into their wounded hearts. It was a noble speech, revealing a noble nature. He was seeking to put these brothers at their ease, to assure them of his forgiveness, to make them forget all their cruel wrong to himself, to induce them even to forgive themselves for their murderous hate, and so to establish a union with them of mutual love and trust. What more manifest evidence could we have of a noble mind, than this tender-hearted readiness to forgive personal injuries? What is there that exalts a man so highly in the esteem of his friends as a generous, kindly, forgiving spirit? "Who is the great man?" asks Buddha. "He who is strongest in the exercise of patience; he who patiently endures injury." And do we not feel that, when a man can overcome the spirit of vindictiveness, when he can cast aside the sweetness of revenge, when he can forbear retaliation for the injury which has been done, or for the insult offered him, he has won for himself a nobility that is solid and true? We love the spirit which forgives most. We are ready to bear emphatic testimony to the nobleness of kindness, to the omnipotence of love. We treasure the remembrance of mercy as amongst the dearest recollections of life.

¶ How sure we are of our own forgiveness from God. How certain we are that we are made in His image, when we forgive heartily and out of hand one who has wronged us. Sentimentally we may feel, and lightly we may say, "To err is human, to forgive

divine"; but we never taste the nobility and divinity of forgiving till we forgive and know the victory of forgiveness over our sense of being wronged, over mortified pride and wounded sensibilities. Here we are in living touch with Him who treats us as though nothing had happened—who turns His back upon the past, and bids us journey with Him into goodness and gladness, into newness of life.[1]

If hasty hand or bitter tongue
Have ever done you causeless wrong
By evil deed or word,
Have no bad thought your heart within,
For malice is a deadly sin
And hateful to the Lord.

Be yours such thought as Joseph felt,
When all his haughty brethren knelt,
As visioned dreams foretold,
And found, in that Egyptian Lord,
The Brother whom their hearts abhorred,
The slave whom they had sold.

Then not a tear, but such as pour
When hearts with love and joy run o'er,
Then not an angry word he gave,
But said, "My brothers, weep no more;
'Twas God who sent me on before
Your dearer lives to save."

A twofold power Forgiveness hath,
She softens hearts, she tempers wrath,
And she is ever strong
To call a blessing down from Heaven;
Christ said, "If ye would be forgiven
Forgive your brother's wrong."[2]

II.

Joseph and his People.

Joseph was not content with merely forgiving his brethren; he gave them practical proof of his sincerity. Arrangements

[1] M. D. Babcock, *Thoughts for Every-Day Living*, 27.
[2] Cecil Frances Alexander.

were made for the settlement of the Hebrew family in Goshen. He invited them to make their abode in Egypt, and secured for their use a part of the country where they were most likely to prosper—the delightful district between the river Nile and the Pelusiac arm of the Red Sea, abounding in luxuriant pasturage, and yielding corn, figs, grapes, pomegranates, and other products, in rich abundance.

1. It is remarkable to see how completely Joseph identified himself with his father and brothers. His father was a Syrian Bedouin chief; his brothers were hale and brawny cattle-dealers, goatherds, and keepers of sheep; they were all men without a settled dwelling-place, living in tents, leading a semi-barbaric life like that of the Arabs of the present day. To the civilized and courtly Egyptians their daily association was a disgrace. Shepherds and herdsmen were in their sight contemptible. Dwelling in cities and amid the refinements of the highest civilization of the age, they regarded these nomadic tribes with a dislike amounting to positive hostility. Yet knowing this, Joseph expressly charged his brothers not to conceal their occupation, and boldly took them to the palace and presented them to the king. A lesser nature would have shrunk with disgust from such an ordeal; would have felt it prudent not to subject himself or his kindred to the cold and cynical criticism of the most cultured court then existing among the nations; would have been ashamed to acknowledge publicly relationship with these rude rustics from the Syrian plains. But Joseph was too noble and magnanimous to permit any selfish consideration to trouble him thus, or to check him in an honourable course. He identified himself with them without reserve, and commanded that they should even carry his bones with them to the "promised land" whenever it might please Providence to lead them thither.

2. Amidst the prosperities of declining life Joseph never overlooked the Divine purpose in his career, or lost faith in the great destiny God had marked out for His people. To all outward seeming he had indeed lived the life of an Egyptian. He had accepted an Egyptian name; he had married an Egyptian wife; he had observed most of the customs of his adopted country,

not excepting even some of the popular superstitions; he had filled his exalted position at Pharaoh's court with manly deference to the conventional usages of the time. Yet all the while he was not an Egyptian. He had not become in any real sense naturalized. Forced exile had not made him a foreigner. All the riches and glory of Egypt had had no power to transform him into an Egyptian, or to tempt him to forget his shepherd home. Though he had identified his own prosperity, happiness, dignity with that country's fortunes; though, by the force of circumstances, his lot had been cast amongst its palaces, its sculptured temples, and the splendid ceremonials of its imperial life, he was still bound up with the fortunes of his own kindred. During the eighty years of his wise and beneficent rule the ancestral spirit, strong within him, never wavered, proving at once a safeguard and an inspiration—a safeguard against all that would weaken his confidence in the Divine promise by which his fathers and their seed were assured that through them all families of the earth should be blessed; and an inspiration to maintain that devout loyalty to God which had proved of such mighty service to him when facing the toils and disappointments of early days. He had not forgotten, nor could he ever forget, bring with them what the passing years would, that he was a Hebrew. To him Egypt was not a home. At heart he continued what his ancestors were, a stranger and a pilgrim. The blood of the Hebrew pulsed in his veins; the aspirations of the Hebrew thrilled his soul; and, cherishing the hope that one day his kinsmen would go up to the promised fatherland, he longed to share their fate. So, when he lay on his death-bed, that faith in the destiny of the chosen people of God, early fanned into a flame in his boyish heart, and remaining with him amidst the cares of manhood, a dearer object than Pharaoh and all Egypt, now manifested itself in its vigour as the supreme motive force in life. "And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land into the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." It is evident that faith in God was the source of Joseph's strength, the power which kept him true, which swayed amid the breeze of his most changeful career. He believed in God. The Divine

promise to his father's house he had accepted for himself, as one of the chosen family, and made it an inspiration to nobleness and truth.

¶ There is a living faith by which a man realizes God as the King of his innermost heart, as the Presence and Spirit which moves in all his action and all his suffering, as the Father, living, good, and just, who is educating him hour by hour, day by day into perfection. It is the power of appropriating God, it was the faith of David, "*My* Shepherd!"[1]

¶ Let us beware of limiting God. Nothing is more foolish than to bound His purposes, especially in the matter of tuition, of the Divine intention and discipline. What can iron ore in the furnace know of its fine and final uses, or a soul in affliction know of "the far-off interest of tears"? We have the minnow's right, as Carlyle puts it, to say what we find in our little creek, but no right to bound the river and ocean beyond our small ideas. Let us ever be subject to hope in our life's tasks, saying, "It is the Lord," strengthening ourselves with a cheerful faith that His purpose is eternal, alive with love, overleaping the last limit of what we ask or think.[2]

Father! beneath Thy sheltering wing
In sweet security we rest,
And fear no evil earth can bring,
In life, in death, supremely blest.

For life is good, whose tidal flow
The motions of Thy will obeys:
And death is good, that makes us know
The Life divine that all things sways.

And good it is to bear the Cross,
And so Thy perfect peace to win:
And nought is ill, nor brings us loss,
Nor works us harm, save only sin.

Redeemed from this, we ask no more,
But trust the love that saves to guide:
The grace that yields so rich a store
Will grant us all we need beside.[3]

[1] Stopford A. Brooke.
[2] M. D. Babcock, *Thoughts for Every-Day Living*, 45.
[3] W. H. Burleigh.

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